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ROGER NORTH AND POLITICAL MORALITY IN THE LATER STUART PERIOD

THE present study of Roger North is offered as an inquiry into a possible field for one of those desiderated 'pieces of work' on the seventeenth century (see *Education and the University*, F. R. Leavis). My aim is to indicate a source of raw material which could be assimilated into the examination of such a statement as Eliot's:

> 'The history of every branch of intellectual activity provides the same record of the diminution of England from the time of Queen Anne. It was not so much the intellect, but something superior to intellect, which went for a long time into eclipse; and this luminary, by whatever name we may call it, has not yet wholly issued from its secular obnubilation. The age of Dryden was still a great age, though beginning to suffer a death of the spirit, as the coarsening of its verse-rhythms shows; by the time of Addison theology, devotion and poetry fell fast into a formalistic slumber'.

I am aware that those generalizations about cultural movements which the critic feels he ought to adduce as corollaries to his literary analysis are, in comparison with the results of the analysis itself, of a cruder, and more imprecise nature. It is therefore important that the source-material itself should be sufficiently complex to prevent the operation of unconscious historical assumptions, and to deter the critic from thinking too easily that he knows what he is looking for.

A study of North will, I think, serve to indicate the limitations of such sociological evidence as is presented in, for example, Beljame's *Men of Letters and the English Public in the 18th century*. Beljame's study was a pioneering effort to relate historical causes to literary effects. As a statement of what happened it is admirable. But in its evaluation of the nature and operation of the causes, in its very close dependence on Macaulay's assumptions, it offers a Whig Interpretation of Literature that can all too temptingly be assimilated into literary generalizations.

By Whig interpretation of literature, I mean, *inter alia*, the unconscious desire to see the virtues of cultural epoch at its beginning, and the vices at the end. Thus the Augustan age is seen as an admirable new direction away from the Restoration, and the

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deficiencies of the Augustans do not appear till we view them in contrast with the Romantic Revival. I hope however that the study of North will provide some material for the substantiation of a contrasting approach that may conveniently be summarized in two propositions. Firstly, that the Augustan compromise is less a new conscious choice, less a reaction away from the Restoration ethos, and rather the elaboration, expansion, and modification of assumptions that were already held by an effectual part of Restoration society. In this connection it is useful to compare the well-known lines from Halifax's description of Charles II:

> 'When once the aversion to bear Uneasiness taketh place in a Man's Mind, it doth so check all the Passions that they are damped into a kind of Indifference'

with Locke's concept of Uneasiness as the sole determinant of the Will:

> 'For desire being nothing but an uneasiness in the want of an absent good, in reference to any pain felt, ease is that absent good; and till that ease be attained we may call it desire; nobody feeling pain that he wishes not to be eased of, with a desire equal to that pain and inseparable from it. . . .When a man is perfectly content with the state he is in—which is when he is perfectly without any uneasiness—what industry, what action, what will is there left, but to continue in it?' (*Concerning Human Understanding* Bk. II, Ch. xxi.)

There is a sense in which Charles II can be called the first Augustan.

Secondly, the Restoration is, admittedly, a period of decay, moral decay. But if we discuss that moral decay solely in terms of the Restoration drama, we shall miss the central significance of the epoch. The really important effects of the Restoration were in terms of moral decay in politics, in the growth of a new attitude to political life which has affected the position of the administrative and executive classes in modern society. There is a vital connection between what happened to political life in the Restoration and the problem so poignantly presented in Eliot's *Coriolan* fragment. The seventeenth century was the dissociative age. The peculiar contribution of the Restoration was the dissociation of politics from morals.

Without idealizing the earlier Stuart period, it can be asserted, with some measure of confidence, that the tone of earlier Stuart political life was a good deal healthier than that of the Restoration—and this in spite of very evident intrigue and financial corruption. For there was as yet no assumption that politics was of necessity an amoral activity, and there was still room for disinterested political service from the man of culture and sensibility—the number of poets who were engaged in political service under the early Stuarts is not without relevance. There is no need to take the *post hoc* theories of patriarchal monarchy (*e.g.* Filmerism) at their face

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value—the theorizing begins when the reality is lost. Yet the Tory-Nonjuring tradition of the later Stuart period testifies to the felt loss of a vital political element in the cultural pattern. The King's Ministers were no longer seen as the King's Servants, as members of the Royal Household. The growth of democratic ideas (to use Whig terminology) was achieved by the un-moralization of political life—political service became at best a neutral form of political activity. In the diaries, memoirs and letters of the time, there is to be found, among men of some integrity, a desire to escape from or to keep out of political life—Sir William Coventry, Sir William Temple, Sir Robert Southwell, the Duke of Ormonde, are only a few names that come at once to mind.

Although 1688 is a useful date for fixing the constitutional change, the real evolution of Restoration political life into the dominant pattern had taken place before that. The rise of Shaftesbury, and the outbreak of the Popish Plot in 1678, are, to my mind, more important in the cultural development of the later Stuart period than the events of 1688. Shaftesbury, and his handling of the Plot, mark the disappearance of the traditional concept of politics as represented by Clarendon.—With Shaftesbury, politics did not consist in the application of moral principles and values to events, nor were integrity and maturity any longer the criteria of political judgment. Shaftesbury turned politics into the business of creating and moulding public opinion in the interests of immediate expediency. North's story of Shaftesbury's attitude to the Plot, whether or not precisely true, typifies the new politics:

> 'A certain Lord, of his Confidence in Parliament, once asked him (Shaftesbury) what he intended to do with the Plot, which was so full of Nonsense, as would scarcely go down with *tantum-non* Ideots; what then could he propose by pressing the Belief of it upon Men of Common Sense, and especially in Parliament? It's no matter, said he, the more Nonsensical the better; if we cannot bring them to swallow worse nonsense than that, we shall never do any Good with them. This was a true politic Thought; For, when the Design is to drive Men upon Changes that are to terminate in their own Confusion and Perdition, it is not to be attempted without an extreme Insanity of Mind, or Infatuation, in the Generality of People, by Way of *Postulatum*, to be well established by previous Experiments upon them'.
>
> (*Examen* pp. 95-6).

Shaftesbury's attitude to politics is but the practical application of Locke's conception of the human mind as a *tabula rasa*, and his view of the narrow limits of human knowledge and the dependence of human judgment on probability. Locke is just as much behind Shaftesbury and the destruction of the traditional morality in the Restoration as he is behind Addison and the formulation of the Augustan compromise.

Roger North himself was avowedly opposed to Locke, and to the application to practical politics of Locke's conception of the

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human understanding. But one of the most interesting features in North's case is the way in which he combines traditionalism with an unconscious acceptance of Locke's positive assumptions.

Roger North came from a family with a long tradition of important public service. The three of his brothers whose lives he wrote were all outstanding figures in different public capacities. Francis rose to be Lord Chief Justice under Charles II and Lord Chancellor under James II. Dudley was a prosperous merchant of the Turkey Company, and on returning to England became Sheriff of London during the Plot crisis, and later Commissioner to the Excise and Treasury. John spent all his active life as a Cambridge don and, when he died at the early age of thirty-eight, held the Chair of Greek and the Mastership of Trinity.

Roger himself was, like Francis, a common lawyer. He had a flourishing practice and held various official appointments. He became an M.P. and in the reign of James II was appointed Attorney General to Queen Mary of Modena. It is significant however that it was the appointment of Jeffries to the Chancellorship rather than the arrival of William III that marked his retirement from public life. After the Revolution, he refused the Oath to William and retired to his country estates till his death in 1734, at the age of eighty-one. During his retirement he wrote the *Examen*, a point by point refutation of Bishop White Kennet's history of the Popish Plot, and also the lives of his three brothers, his own autobiography two treatises on music, and numerous miscellaneous essays for the most part unpublished. He was a man of varied interests—history, law, music, economics, landscape gardening, architecture, painting (he was executor to Sir Peter Lely), to say nothing of scientific speculation in the approved manner of the *virtuosi*.

In order therefore to give some appearance of orderliness to North's scattered opinions I shall restrict myself to material illustrative of the three following topics. (1) His conception of politics. (2) His conception of law. (3) His conception of the function of his class in contemporary society.

I.

In discussing North's attitude to politics, it is tempting to use the labels Non-Juror and Tory, but these not only oversimplify North's case, they confuse it. (It is, incidentally because Dr. Johnson is labelled a Tory that his highly personal brand of politics has come to be regarded merely as a quaint eccentricity that bears no connection with the central moral earnestness that animates his critical opinions). North's Toryism represents his explicit political opinions, but there are also operative in his judgments some implicit assumptions which, if stated explicitly, he would be the first to disown.

North's Toryism involves a concern for, and a belief in traditional values. His loyalty to the monarchy springs from his conception of it firstly as the fulfilment of personal service and loyalty,

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and secondly as the embodiment of law, the stabilizing factor in society. North's Toryism represents his belief in what politics ought to be, and how they ought to be conducted. The guides of the individual politician or public servant were to be his own moral integrity, his powers of judgment, and the weight of his own experience coupled with traditional wisdom. All North's positives, as a Tory, are in sharp contrast with the practical effects of Locke's political and philosophical theory. In the name of religion and property Locke had wished to cut away from traditional wisdom, to exalt the necessity of expediency and probability, and to minimize the capacities of the human understanding, by his denial of the force of the moral will, his narrow limitation of human knowledge, and his insistence on the precarious foundations of human judgment.

North shows the inadequacy of political labels because, although in his explicit statements of principle his line of argument runs directly counter to Locke (and sometimes seems to be written with an eye to the direct confutation of Locke), yet in his practical judgments on historical events and personalities he follows the same assumptions as Locke, in his scepticism of human capacity in politics, and in his faith in peace and tranquillity as its own justification. In a passage in the *Examen* he discusses the nature of political wisdom. The complications of politics, he argues, are the very reason why political actions should be governed by Christian morality and traditional moral wisdom:

> 'The Public [*i.e.* public affairs] is always a profound Mystery; and Events are derived from such Infinity of lurking Springs and Causes, that no Man or Men in the World, yet, could ever be Master of. *No Machiavellian*, the Devil himself is not Politician enough, by knowing all Things . . . It may be objected that this sets all Men at a Loss what to do and how to behave themselves. I answer No; let them avoid that Rock of Confidence in their own Capacities, and there are plain and obvious Measures to be had; which, if Men would pursue, there could be no Want of nicer Directions. As first, Christian Religion, whereof the Rules, with respect to Worldly Affairs, are consummate Wisdom; and Religion itself seems, in some Respect, given to Men to supply the Defects of their Capacity of judging . . . Let this be a sacred Argument, *viz.* Is the Consequence doubtful? Yes. Is the Honesty clear? Yes. And Follow that.
>
> *The Use of old Maxims, the declining of which in Counsel is a Sign of a Cheat*: Next we have the ancient approved Maxims, that is, short Sentences, commonly called Proverbs, and the ordinary Fables and Apologues, in which the Experience and Judgment of Ages, perhaps in some Instances, ever since the Creation of the World, [*sc.* is] collected, and traditionally conveyed, through all Times, down to us. Such as, *Honesty is the best Policy; Seldom comes a better; Changes never answer the End;* and many others to the different Purposes of Life, current

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in common History as well as common Discourse. And no less valuable are diverse of the common Apologues. As of the Horse and the Stag. The Frogs and Jupiter. Peace made between the Sheep and the Wolves. Horned Beasts forbid the Court. And the like also to various other Purposes: But I instance in such as relate most to Government, which every Schoolboy knows, and Men make slight of; although it is seldom found but, in the gross Consequences of public Affairs, they hold true, and if I said never failed, I should not be much out of the Way . . . All of which is an Argument, not only of the Usefulness, but also of the Necessity of the proverbial Wisdom; especially such as hath been derived down to us from Antiquity. And what confirms it more is, that all our own self-interested, tricking Politicians, do all they can to put Men off from those strong Holds, and urge them to rely upon their own Judgments. And then, having gained their Point so far, miserable Mankind lies open to all the Delusion in the World; and what can secure from Frauds, that yield to be Cheaters of themselves? Nay, it is an excellent Test of Fourbery, wherever it appears, that the propositions are contrary to approved Maxims. As when Self-Interest is used for an Argument against Honesty; when subtile Contrivances are brought forward in the Room of plain Dealing; when new Friendships offer to displace old ones; when the Advice of Strangers is recommended against that of Parents and Kindred without Exception; and many more as, to recount, would be endless. And Nothing is so obnoxious to Impositions of this Kind, as the State of the Public is; touching which a common Man can never be tenacious enough of the wise Maxims of his Nation and Government. And, whatever the Syrens of Faction sing, it is to be concluded that the Auditors are intended to be made Properties of to betray themselves, as they certainly do if they once become sure of those inaccessible Truths, and intricate Mass of ingredient Circumstances, as are necessary for making any right Judgment of Consequences, without recourse to the approved Maxims which all Ages have recommended, and all Persons agree in'. (*Examen* pp. 351-3.)

North's reference to Maxims, and his whole conception of maxims in relation to political wisdom and the nature of political judgments have a directly contrary reference to Locke's attack on the scientific value of maxims in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

'Where our ideas are determined in our minds, and have annexed to them by us known and steady names under those settled determinations, there is little need, or no use at all of (such) maxims, to prove the agreement or disagreement of any of them. He that cannot discern the truth or falsehood of such propositions, without the help of (these and the like) maxims, will not be helped by (these) maxims to do it: since he cannot be supposed to know the truth of (these) maxims themselves without proof, if he cannot know the truth of others without proof, which

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> are as self-evident as these . . . And as these maxims are of little use where we have determined ideas, so they are, as I have showed, of dangerous use where our ideas are not determined; and where we use words that are not annexed to determined ideas, but such as are of a loose and wandering signification, sometimes standing for one, and sometimes for another idea: from which follow mistake and error, which these maxims (brought as proofs to establish propositions, wherein the terms stand for undetermined ideas) do by their authority confirm and rivet'.
>
> (*Essay concerning Human Understanding* IV. vii.)

It will be pointed out that Locke's discussion of the term is on a purely philosophical level. Yet I would maintain that the contrast presented by the two attitudes shows the point of emergence of a specifically 'modern' attitude to traditional wisdom. If we add to the *catena* the passage in Halifax's already mentioned Character of Charles II, which refers to 'that fundamental Maxim of not purchasing anything at the price of a Difficulty', we have, I think, the kind of concrete material for a study of Literature, Life, and Thought, more integral and real than a mere collocation of disconnected questions on the same examination paper.

In the above-quoted passage, North shows that he is fully aware of the practical implications of Locke's philosophy, and owing to circumstances of breeding and education, North could still proclaim the kind of values that Locke and Shaftesbury were destroying and replacing. Locke's contemporaries saw, I think more clearly than we do, that Locke belongs not to the history of philosophy, but to the history of England.

But, as I have suggested before, North's relation to Locke is not entirely that of reaction. Only when he is putting on, as it were, a set-piece frontal attack, do we see the sharp antagonism. But in his judgments of events, and particularly his description of the behaviour of Charles II and of Lord Keeper North, we find North unconsciously appealing to Locke's positives, and using them in harness with, and in substantiation of, the traditional conceptions. In the preface to the *Examen*, where he hopes perhaps to establish good relations with the Augustan reader, he invokes Augustan positives by referring to Kennet's *History* as 'so grossly abusive of Truth and good Manners, as not to be endured in a lettered State' (p. ii). His 'Truth' has a much stronger positive force than the Augustan 'Truth', but is suitably acclimatized by its conjunction with 'good' Manners and 'a lettered State'. The same technique is apparent in the opening of his treatise on *The Study of the Laws*, where he says 'the true policy of life is to provide that the latter part may be easy and comfortable . . . and which way should a man secure this to himself, but from the course of a profession?' But though advocating the Law in much the same terms as *The Spectator* would recommend commerce to Will Wimble, North's reason for its advocacy is wholly un-Augustan, and springs from his concept of Law as the living embodiment of a traditional moral order.

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More serious and important is the way in which he slips into an almost complete reliance on Augustan positives when he describes external characteristics of personalities, or when he seeks to vindicate the doubtful morality of the actions of some of his heroes. At a certain level the political outlook of Shaftesbury (the enemy) and Charles (the hero) are seen to be identical:

> 'His Lordship . . . went great Lengths, and came very near to his Desires; and nothing but a peculiar, I may say unaccountable Crisis, on the King's part, could have crossed him. If the King had been either very peremptory and positive, or very compliant in every thing, his Majesty had been lost; for the whole Train against him was directed upon one of those Dispositions presumed, and he was of neither: So a middle Course, commonly the worst, in the Conjuncture of that Reign, proved the best Policy . . .'

. . . 'A middle Course, commonly the worst'. The traditional morality speaks here with a very still small voice.

> 'If he (Shaftesbury) was a Friend really to any human Kind, besides himself, I believe it was to King *Charles* II; whose Gayety, Breeding, Wit, good Humour, Familiarity and Disposition to Enjoy the Pleasures of Society and Greatness, engaged him, very much, that had a great share of Wit, Agreeableness and Gallantry himself. But this same Superiority spoiled all; his Majesty would not always be influenced by him, but would take short Turns on his Toe, and so frustrate his Projects: And, by that, finding he could not work under him, strove if possible, to reduce his Authority and get above him . . .' (*Examen* p. 119)

A contrast between Clarendon's character portraits (as discussed by Professor Knights[1]) should bring out the paucity of North's range. With Clarendon every epithet was weighted with a moral significance, and clear denotation of value. The pressure behind Clarendon's vocabulary would never have allowed him to equate on such terms, two characters of which he had such different estimates. The Caroline depth beneath Gaiety, Breeding, Wit, Familiarity, and Gallantry has silted up until they are conventional Augustan epithets. It is only because of their shallowness that North can apply them equally to persons whom he regards, in the larger view, as mutually antagonistic.

The description continues:

> 'I know but two considerable Errors he (Shaftesbury) committed, I mean in the Way of Pure Politics. The first was in exposing himself to be outwitted by King *Charles* II for he made a fule (*sic*) account that his Majesty, out of Ambition of Power, would have persisted in the Counsels he and his Colleagues had seasoned and undertaken to carry through for him; But the King's giving Way let fall a fair Frame of Confusion, which he,

[1] *Scrutiny* XV 2, p. 105 *sq*.

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for diverse Years, and with great Art, had been putting together. He should have understood human Nature better, and been aware, that Men of Pleasure, that take all Liberties, if they have good Sense, and are not Humourists, even in a good Cause, never, or very rarely, stand out in suffering; and much less when they find themselves cheated; and then to persist is right down Folly; And this was the King's Case'. (*Examen* p. 123)

Here North's juggling with terms is positively tendencious. The ambiguity of the sentence 'The King's giving Way let fall a fair Frame of Confusion, which he (*i.e.* Shaftesbury), for diverse Years, and with great Art, had been putting together' seems to be a deliberate attempt to convey the impression that somehow Shaftesbury was responsible for the confusion which resulted from Charles's change of front. And of course the invocation of Augustan positives 'if they have good Sense, and are not Humourists' effectively blankets 'Men of Pleasure, that take all Liberties'.

II.

In his concept of the function of the Common Law, North's traditionalism finds its fullest expression. The Common Law is for him the embodiment of a developing yet constant expression of natural justice and equity, and his theories of monarchy derive from his conception of it as the highest expression and conservator of Law. He describes the Court of Common Pleas:

'There all Suits are drawn forth upon the ancient and genuine Process of the common Law; and, as the Lord Nottingham in one of his Speeches, expresseth, *The Law is there at home*. The Time of that Court is not taken up with factious Contentions, as at the *King's-Bench*, where more News than Law is stirring'. (*Life of Francis North*, 1742, p. 21)

His reverence for the Law is the basis of his Non-Juring and Passive Resistance. The Common Law is to North more than merely a form of English Law which coincides with his conceptions of natural justice and equity. Rather, natural justice and equity hold force in every valid form of government, and in England they operate through the forms of the Common Law. To North the absence of any legislative powers (*e.g.* Parliament) and the rule of absolute authority, by no means necessitates an absence of Law. Law is the active force which makes any society cohere as a society:

'If there were no Laws at all in a Country, but the Will and Pleasure of a Potentate, or some Juncto, were really and truly the Law; that binds every Subject in Conscience to Obedience. Yet even that supreme Power is subject to Rules, or Law; for there is not, nor can there be, any Power upon the Face of the Earth, above, or without Law. For where none are declared, and there is no Superior to exact Accounts, yet the Law of natural Justice and Equity prevail. And so a despotic Ruler is tied up as much to the Law, in Duty and Conscience, as any Sub-Governor is,

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who, by his Commission, is restricted to Rules. . . . Wherefore, if the Consciences of Men were not some Security, in the general, among promiscuous Societies, and in the ordinary Dealings of the World; the Cases of Innocent Men, that are most apt to rely on it, were very hard. But I dare say that, however open Differences make a Noise, there is in the World, bad as it is, more Justice among Men, upon Account of the common Obligation of Equity and Conscience, than from all the Process of Law and the Coercion of the Magistrate all the World over. And these Men, who argue so strongly against all Trust, especially that lodged in Governors, which is and will be a pure Trust as long as the World stands, do but show how little of that Principle is to be found in themselves, which they think wholly wanting in others'. (*Examen*, pp. 335-6)

Note the weight given to most *un*-Lockian positives: Natural Justice and Equity, Will, Understanding, Conscience, Trust. North's faith in the Common Law rests not on any faith in the coercive legal machinery, but in the age-old concept of the natural capacity for legality of the individual—the mediæval *liber et legalis homo*.

But in practical application, North's theory of Law becomes as narrowly utilitarian as that of Hobbes or Locke. When discussing some of the legal tricks of his brother Dudley in Turkey he writes:

'The Reason, why Justice is so sacred, is not because the Cause of Suit, or Thing claimed, in itself, is of any great Regard, (for that Argument will bring all Things to a levelling, as why should one Man have too much, and another want?) but because it preserves Peace and Quietness among Men, which is the greatest of all temporal good Things. And consequently wrong Judgments soon, and final, have the Virtue of Justice, because Peace and Quietness is thereby preserved'. (*Life of Sir Dudley North*, 1744, p. 53)

This is comparable with Locke's conception of political society as a condition where men

. . . 'unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living, one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it. . . . (*Civil Government* II. 95)

. . . 'The great end of men's entering into society being the enjoyment of their properties in peace and safety, and the great instrument and means of that being the laws established in that society. . . ' (*Civil Government* II. 134)

and Hobbes's view that

. . . 'men, for the attaining of peace, and conservation of themselves thereby . . . have made artificial chains, called *civil laws*, which they themselves, by mutual covenants, have fastened at one end, to the lips of that man or assembly, to whom they have given the sovereign power; and at the other end to their own

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ears. These bonds, in their own nature but weak, may nevertheless be made to hold, by the danger, though not the difficulty of breaking them. . . .' (*Leviathan,* Ch. XXI)

The reference to Hobbes raises a further issue. The reactions of the representatives of the traditional Caroline ethos are always consistently opposed to Hobbes. Yet at first sight it would appear that Hobbes's theory of autocratic power would have been most acceptable to those who were advocates of Royal Prerogative and of unlimited monarchial power. To explain the constant Royalist attacks on Hobbes as being due to some political flirtation by Hobbes with the Commonwealth government seems to me to be inadequate. The Royalists were attacking the political theory of Hobbes, not only for its *content,* but also for its *tone.* It was the shallowness, the crudity, the brutality of Hobbes that was so shocking, and that called forth replies from men who still clung to the vision of the delicately adjusted complex cultural unity that had been developing in the years before '41.

A discussion of Hobbes occurs in North's life of his brother John, and reveals again the contrast between the explicit and implicit reactions. Amongst Dr. John's numerous unaccomplished plans.

> . . . "He intended a Confutation of Mr. *Hobbes* (a writer, at that Time, much in vogue) and . . . as an Appendant to that, a Discourse of natural Justice amongst Men, all positive Laws whatsoever abstracted; that is how all Men, according to right Reason, are bound to live together, if no Pact, or Law, of any Kind, had been ever established'. (*Life of Dr. John North,* 1744, p. 263)

In reaction to the name, Doctor John responds in the orthodox manner. But in his discussion of Monarchy in relation to Civil War, Roger records him as offering a justification which corresponds approximately to the basic theme of *Behemoth*:

> . . . 'The Grievances under Monarchy fall mostly upon ambitious troublesome Grandees, who are made amends by the Advantages they have in high Places. But all that while the People have their Ease and Quiet; and in that one single article of suppressing civil War, the People, who are seldom undone in any other, but most frequently that, Way, are more than adequately compensated for all the evils of Monarchy that Speech-makers can suggest. . . ." (*Life of Dr. John North,* 1744, p. 271)

III.

The third aspect of North's works which should be mentioned, namely his awareness that the cultural élite, the administrative and executive class, was losing its accepted place in society, develops from the two previous topics. The cause was far more organic than the fact of William III's arrival. Throughout the later seventeenth century, the cultural élite became more and more

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dissociated from contemporary political life because the application of moral and intellectual values to contemporary political life became increasingly difficult to maintain. The achievement of political objectives through the organs of government (in their state of development at the time) imposed intolerable demands in personal integrity and sensibility. Thus, in families like those of North and his class, there was a marked drift away from the sphere of 'practical politics' into activities which were far less obviously of social 'usefulness'. And with this shifting of interest there goes a hesitancy and uncertainty of objective social valuation that I have already tried to indicate in the discussion of North's views on politics and law.

There is, in the first place, a direct connexion between the decline of political morality, the dissociation of the élite, and the growth of the cult of the *virtuoso*. The impetus given to scientific speculation and invention in the late 17th century was partly an escape from political responsibility. Science (as the 17th century *virtuoso* saw it) was delightfully neutral. It provided an ideal sphere of activity which did not raise any difficult problems of ethical conduct. The rise of the *philosophe*, the inventor, the antiquary, genealogist, bibliomaniac, numismatist, and other species of crank, can be partly attributed to the desire of a frustrated political and social energy to seek an outlet in a non-moral sphere of activity. There is a tendency for us to over-idealize the Royal Society, but North's comment on Francis North's refusal of an F.R.S. is significant:

> 'He esteem'd it a Species of Vanity for one, as he was, of a grave Profession, to list himself of a Society which, at that Time, was made very free with by the Ridiculers of the Town. . . ' (*Life of Francis North*, 1742, p. 285)

For apart from the few great names, the bulk of the support for the Royal Society came from members whose interests were frivolous or extraneous. Some of the more standard types are referred to by North: Mr. Weld, 'a rich philosopher (who) lived in Bloomsbury. He was single, and his House a sort of Knick-knack-atory': Sir Samuel Moreland, who invented a portable kitchen for frying eggs in his coach—and of course Aubrey. There is just a sufficient tinge of irony in North's description of Weld and Moreland to objectify his valuation, but this is replaced by a different tone in his description of himself and his brother Dudley in their enforced retirement from political life:

> 'We instituted a Laboratory. One Apartment was for Wood-Works, and the other for Iron. His Business was hewing and framing, and, being permitted to sit, he would labour very hard; and, in that manner, he hewed the Frames for our necessary Tables. He put them together only with Laps and Pins; but so, as served the Occasion very well. We got up a Table and a Bench: But the great Difficulty was to get Bellows and a Forge. He hewed such Stone as lay about, and built an Hearth with a

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back, and, by Means of Water, and an old Iron which he knocked right down, he perforated that Stone for the Wind to come at the Fire. What common Tools we wanted, we sent and bought, and also a Leather Skin, with which he made a Pair of Bellows that wrought over Head, and the Wind was conveyed by Elder Guns let into one another, and so it got to the Fire. Upon finding a Piece of an old Anvil, we went to work, and wrought all the Iron that was used in our Manufactory. He delighted most in hewing. He allowed me, being a *Lawyer* as he said, *to be the best Forger*. We followed the Trade so constantly and close, and he coming out sometimes with a red short Wastecoat, red Cap, and black Face, the Country People began to talk as if we used some unlawful Trades there, clipping at least; and, it might be, coining of Money. Upon this we were forced to call in the Blacksmith, and some of the Neighbours, that it might be known that there was neither Damage nor Danger to the State by our Operations. This was Morning's Work, before dressing; to which Duty we were usually summoned by the Lady full of Admiration what Creatures she had in her Family. In the Afternoons too we had Employment which was somewhat more refined; and that was Turning and Planing for which Use we sequestered a low Closet. We had our Engines from *London,* and many round Implements were made. I contrived a Way-wiser, and we both wrought upon it hard till it came to Perfection, and was fixed upon a Calash we used. . . . And Sir *Theophilus Gimcrack*, as Sir *Dudley* was pleased to style our Way-wiser, the wooden Knight, was a Call to go abroad in the Chaise, with design to prove the Distances of Places; and it was no smali Entertainment to observe the unaccountable Variety of vulgar Estimates. But, in our Laboratories, it was not a little strange to see with what Earnestness nad Pains we worked, sweating most immoderately, and scarce allowing ourselves Time to eat. At the lighter Works, in the afternoon, he hath sat, perhaps, scraping a Stick, or turning a Piece of Wood, and this for many Afternoons together, all the while singing like a Cobler, incomparably better pleased than he had been in all the Stages of his Life before'.

Now of course the general impression of the passage exudes quite enough of quaintness and old-world charm to satisfy those arbiters of modern opinion on the 17th century who have, within twelve months, given us a biography of Aubrey and three editions of his none too brief *Lives* at a time when we are supposed to be suffering from a book shortage. But there is a degree of self-awareness and a maturity in North wholly lacking in the piddling gossip of Aubrey. North is sufficiently intelligent, sufficiently in touch with a decaying tradition, to be aware of what is dying and what is being lost. The quaintness and archness of North is conscious, the humour is a self-dramatizing pose, adopted as a defence against North's awareness of the futility of their occupations. Behind the jokes there is a nervous laughter—'He allowed

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me, being a *Lawyer* as he said, *to be the best Forger*' . . . 'there was neither Damage nor Danger to the State by our operations' . . . 'Employment somewhat more refined . . .' . . . 'It was no small *Entertainment* to observe the unaccountable Variety of vulgar Estimates' . . . 'it was not *a little strange* to see with what Earnestness and Pains we worked' . . . —all these touches are preparing us, and North, for the forced pragmatism, the deliberate suppression of a sense of social and moral purpose, that concludes the passage:

> ' . . . It is a mortifying Speculation, that of the different Characters of this Man's Enjoyments, separated one from the other, and exposed to an indifferent Choice, there is scarce any one, but this I have here described, really worth taking up. And yet the Slavery of our Nature is such, that this must be despised, and all the rest, with the attendant Evils of Vexation, Disappointments, Dangers, Loss of Health, Disgraces, Envy, and what not of Torment, be admitted. It was well said of the Philosopher to *Pyrrhus*: *What follows after all your Victories? To sit down and make merry. And cannot you do so now?*'' (*Life of Sir Dudley North*, 1744, p. 201 sq.)

The non-moral, even non-utilitarian conception of scientific improvements in the Restoration-Augustan transition is noticeable in North's comments on Sir Ralph Delaval's construction of a harbour by the salt-manufactory at Seton Delaval:

> 'if, on the whole, the Profit did not answer the Account, the Pleasure of designing and executing, which is the most exquisite of any, did it' (*Life of Francis North*, p. 138).

But though 'Entertainment in observing the unaccountable Variety of vulgar Estimates' and the 'exquisite Pleasure of designing and executing' were the new social objectives of North's contemporary society, nevertheless, on the country estates, where the estate was large enough to form a social organism independent of the main currents of national life, the traditional Caroline conception of a homogeneous and balanced pattern of cultural unity still held. North's description of the Duke of Beaufort's estate at Badminton is too long to be quoted in full here, but the scene fires North's moral imagination. His description is sure, confident, and eager, as if he were anxious to find an objective reality on which his positives will ring true:

> 'He (Beaufort) had about two Hundred Persons in his Family, all provided for; and in his capital House, nine original Tables cover'd every Day: And, for the Accommodation of so many, a large Hall was built, with a sort of Alcove, at one End, for Distinction; but yet the whole lay in the View of him that was Chief, who had Power to do what was proper for keeping Order amongst them: And it was his Charge to see it done. . . . The Method of governing this great Family was admirable and easy, and such as might have been a Pattern for any Management whatever . . . nothing was forced, or strained, but easy and familiar,

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as if it was, and really so I thought it to be, the Common Course and Way of living in that Family.

One thing more I must needs relate, which the Duke told us smiling; and it was this. When he was in the midst of his Building, his Neighbour, the Lord Chief Justice *Hales*, made him a visit; and observing the many Contrivances the Duke had for the disposing of so great a Family, he craved Leave to suggest one to him, which he thought would be much for his Service: and it was, *to have but one Door to his House, and the Window of his Study, where he sat most, open upon that*. This shows how hard it is for even wise and learned Men to consider Things without themselves'. (*Life of Francis North*, 1742, p. 134 sq.)

There is a delicacy and sureness of touch in North's contrast between the conception of a mean and petty tyranny implied in Hales's remark, and the generous, humane, and living conception of a social organism that emerges from the description of Beaufort's administration of his estates.

But, alas, North did not have many opportunities for a wholehearted moral response to the objects of his description. In his defence of his brothers there is an uncertainty and hesitancy that indicate a reluctance to register positively his own criteria. The nervous quality of the irony in his comments on Francis North's Chancellorship is a marked instance of this:

'He wanted a good general Apathy: And that one may break into two Qualifications necessary to an overcharged Minister of State. (1) As to himself, Equanimity. (2) As to all others, Indifference. (1) The former sounds a little philosophic, and means a Carelessness of Events, and the being no more concerned at what may happen to him, than at the Weather, or anything else, that is out of his Power. (2) As to others, the Case is not very commendable; for it supposeth one to be wholly unconcerned in the Questions of Right and wrong, not caring who is injured, or suffers, or who gets or who loses, how, when, or why; and, in Office, to be without Compassion, as a Butcher that kills and slays habitually, without Remorse; nor to let any Pleasure, or Advantage, be frustrate, or Sleep broke, for what Men call Duty, and making no Account of Good or Evil, but what Self-Enjoyment or Interest, shall denominate. These Qualifications, supposing them to be so necessary as, in some Times, they are, show how little qualified an honest, wise Man, and a good Christian, is for this great Employment, in ill-natured and perverse Times'. (*Life of Francis North*, p. 275)

The condemnation of the 'executive type' so ruthlessly depicted is *there*, but only just. The irony is only half-hearted: . . .'a good general Apathy . . . a little philosophic . . . the Case is not very commendable . . . what Men call Duty . . .' and the antithesis of the image of the Butcher and 'an honest, wise Man, and a good Christian'. Underlying the whole tone of the passage is the con-

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viction that North's own sense of tradition and positive values is, in fact, not an ideal, but rather a nuisance and an encumbrance—how much more comfortable, we are meant to conclude, would he and his class be without it.

Lest it should be thought that this sense of conflict in North is the result of the importation into his works of a complexity that is not there, I would draw attention to a striking passage from the *Autobiography* where he undertakes a serious justification of suicide, and concludes it as follows:

> 'And if I never act otherwise than those who are of the contrary opinion, as I believe I shall not; yet I have this advantage, that I have ease and repose in my mind so as if ever I am overwhelmed in irremediable calamity and pain, I may, if I find I cannot bear them, put a period to free myself, and in this thought I have great comfort, and have and shall continue to have all my life long. . . . To say that I must do all the good that is in my power, and that it is a duty whereof the breach thereof is sin, were to make mankind mad, and therefore is impracticable and cannot be law'. (*Autobiography* ed. Jessop, 1887, p. 156)

North has arrived at the Augustan compromise through a hopeless, conscious cynicism and despair. It was the impact of Restoration political life that had driven him to this position:

> 'I have learnt the folly of projects, the danger and the countenance of all false and treacherous plotmongers, can smell and avoid them at a distance, and not to be drawn by any *ignis fatuus* into danger; to do my duty in private, and not to overvalue my character to think that I can avail anything in the affairs of the world to influence them one way or another. It is enough if I can govern my private economy; I am satisfied, and hope nothing will ever prevail to draw me from it. I could see the rottenness of men; those against the Government were mad, and those for it generally false'. (*Autobiography*, p. 170)

The peace of the Augustans. Scratch a little below the surface and in what do we find that peace to consist? A rejection (in North's case a deliberate, conscious and painful rejection) of social obligation, a consequent cynicism and despair, and a potentiality of madness and suicide. The Augustan compromise was based on the recognition that in the Restoration an irremediable breach had been made between political life and moral obligation, and yet the very mental outlook which had contributed to the breach was part of the compromise as well.

What happened to North and to later Stuart culture is clearly of relevance to the 'modern situation'. The outlook that must belong to an intellectual élite worthy of the name, an outlook derived from personal integrity, mature awareness, and humane sensitivity, is the very outlook that it is impossible to maintain in political life—and political life is, or should be, *par excellence* the sphere of the social activity of the élite. The values of humanism,

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qualified by whatever adjectives you like, are not only at a discount in modern society, they are virtually inhibitive to what goes by the name of responsible social activity.[1] The case of North shows that the fault does not lie with the humanist, and that in answer to the familiar question, the modern Bezonian is quite justified in refusing *either* to speak *or* to die.

T. A. BIRRELL.

MEDIEVAL IDIOM IN SHAKESPEARE

(II) SHAKESPEARE AND THE MEDIEVAL ETHIC

THE relations between dramatic art and the prevailing ethic have not been given all the attention they deserve; and to do justice to the topic would require considerable critical talent united to a deep insight into the history of religion and philosophy (an unlikely combination). When, however, we narrow our problem down to Shakespeare, we find it relatively easy to define the moral ideas which helped to shape the plays. For the Reformation was not yet a heterogeneous mass of dissentient opinions and practices; it appealed largely because it so clearly embodied so many of the old ideas. Its great book, the *Book of Common Prayer*, was essentially medieval in its doctrines and suppositions. And, however cramping and dogmatic the medieval ethic may appear to-day, no one can deny its clarity. To grasp the dramatic significance of that clarity, we may note two points about it—that, like all other clear systems, it made its own deliberate omissions; yet it was more inclusive than any other ethic which has succeeded it.

Among its deliberate omissions, the thing which perhaps strikes the modern readers most is its insouciance about temporal and

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[1]The distrust of 'practical' politics that Arnold shows so markedly in his 'Function of Criticism' essay might be profitably compared with some valuations from Beatrice Webb: (i) on Joseph Chamberlain, 'Not extraordinary that the man of passionate conviction, or of the will which simulates it and clothes it in finely worded general principles, who ignores complexity in all things, should become the ruling spirit, when the ultimate appeal, the moving force, rests with the masses whose desires are prompted by passion and unqualified by thought'. (*My Apprenticeship* p. 110): (ii) on Mr. Gladstone (quoting T. H. Huxley) 'Gladstone never sought truth for itself but always regarded principles and opinions in so far as they were held and expressed by a more or less number of people'. (*ibid.* p. 262).

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material things. The various 'problems' which pre-empt the modern mind (social justice for workers, the relations of economics to politics, etc.) do not appear to have caught the medieval imagination; the English and Roman Histories of Shakespeare and Jonson proceed from an interest in politics very different from that found in *The Apple Cart*. For in general, medieval, and consequently Elizabethan, morality supposed the primacy of eternal things. There are few points on which it is easier to misinterpret the medieval mind than on this *mundi fuga*, this rejection of all temporal interests. The truly orthodox mind believed that *everything* outside God was created by God, and so gave evidence of his wisdom and goodness; hence, there were liturgical blessings and consecrations for the most commonplace objects. The sacramental system particularly was the perpetual reminder of the sacredness of even material things, especially of the human body; and Francis of Assisi, so typical in so many ways of the medieval spirit, was a great lover (a great worshipper, one might call him) of the material world. The general orthodox belief was that the material and the temporal are important, but only with a subordinate importance—as means to the eternal and the spiritual. This attitude filtered to some extent into the Elizabethan drama; there in general it meant that plays did not deal with themes which we to-day should consider topical either for our times or for theirs. It is true, of course, the plays drew on questions of contemporary interest;[1] but, as Knights points out:

> 'none of the plays (which have a more or less overt social reference) is a dramatization of an economic problem or consciously intended as propaganda for this or that form of economic organization, and only a few of them . . . are meant to make the audience think about questions of social morality.'

The apparatus of life, either physical or administrative, did not occupy attention to a degree at all comparable to what we find to-day. Certainly, as far as Shakespeare is concerned, there is an almost complete indifference to the contemporary forms which political, social and economic problems were then taking. This neglect enabled him to concentrate on the kind of dramatic material which best suited his genius—the abiding core, the formulable substratum of human appetites and interests which are not the exclusive property of the Elizabethans but underlie every important human problem.

There is another lacuna in the medieval ethic which, at first sight, appears to be at variance with the whole cast of Shakespeare's mind but actually assisted it—its impersonality. As Knights has put it in relation to Jonson:

> 'In his handling of ambition, greed, lust, acquisitiveness and so on he implicitly, but clearly, refers to a more than personal scheme of values.'

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[1]For these questions, and their implications, see Knights: *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, Introduction, especially p. 6.

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There is something impersonal, anonymous, about most of the great achievements of the Middle Ages; the cathedrals, the ballads, the religious plays come to mind immediately. But the quality went further. No one but Dante could have written the *Commedia*, no one but Aquinas the *Summa Contra Gentiles*; and hardly anyone could strive more than these two to rise above merely individual, local and contemporary interests. Aquinas particularly set himself the task of being the spokesman of the universal Church, and even of the whole human race. If, in the work of Addison and Pope, we are aware of a whole society, we are in Aquinas, in Dante, and in Shakespeare, aware of a mankind liberated, as far as the restrictions of human thought and language permit, from the confines of time and space. At the highest level—in Dante, in Shakespeare—the intensely individual and the impersonal become one; their work, while highly personal, voices the attitudes and interests of a society so large that it must remain anonymous.

It is into this form of anonymity that we should try to fit the practice of widespread borrowing which is found in Aquinas, in Dante, in Chaucer, and in Shakespeare. There is still to-day an inclination to be half-apologetic about this practice, or to justify it on the grounds of what the genius made of what he borrowed. It is really much more respectable than such attitudes would suggest; It proceeds from the medieval conviction that everything in the intellectual and spiritual spheres belongs to everyone; the feeling of a spiritual community was deeper between the 10th and the 16th centuries than ever before or since; the Gothic cathedral supposed the readiness on the part of many to pool the mental resources implied in a Religion originally oriental, in Latin orderliness, and in a wild, free play of fancy which comes from the north of Europe. The Christian Church was built on the supposition that it is only in a mental or spiritual communism that the individual finds his true fulfilment. Shakespearean tragedy, with a blend of forces not unlike that of the Gothic cathedral and with the addition of Greek tradition and native English influences, presents the most complete and the most searching portrait of the human race to be found in our language; it is only within so wide a framework that the individual type or character can be most fully expressed.

There is another element in the medieval ethic which is rather more apparent in Shakespeare than in the formal theologians—the unresolved residue of paganism. The early Christian apologists had insisted that no religion is wholly false or bad; the Christian attitude towards paganism was never wholly hostile. There occurred what has been called the 'baptizing' of the pagan feasts (of which Easter, the Spring fertility rite, is the most obvious) and of the pagan stories (of which the Arthurian legends are the best known). But although every effort was made to bring paganism within the Christian way of life, the two were never wholly reconciled; in *Hamlet,* with the pondering of the 'canon against self-slaughter', and the casualness with which Polonius is killed, we have a remnant of the old dichotomy.

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When all these qualifications have been made, the fact still remains that the medieval ethic was uniquely clear and sprang from a uniquely integrated view of the universe. The nearest thing to this in times closer to ourselves is the world of the 18th century. To Pope, as to Dante, the universe was a very 'tidy' system, in which the king, the artist, the farmer, God Himself 'knew their place', and whatever happened, happened within a universal reign of law. There is this great difference, however, that Pope's tidiness depends on leaving many things out of account. Respect for his great achievement both as poet and as clarifier of the norms of his time should not blind us to the fact that there could be no place in his poetic world for the 'hysterica passio' of Lear or the perplexing 'illness about the heart' of Hamlet. Between the time of Donne and the time of Pope, the western world had lost the omnivorous quality of intellect which was one of the gifts of medieval civilization to the artists of the Renaissance. The medieval synthesis was not merely conventionally neat in the manner of the Victorians, or exclusive of whole sections of human life and activity in the manner of the Augustans.

Since genius modifies what it borrows, it may be well to look briefly at the medieval conception of morality as it was in itself, and then note the modifications Shakespeare introduces. There were two qualities in the medieval ethic which appear superflous to many to-day—its objectivity and its constant reference to an eternal scheme of things. It was objective in two ways: as coming from God Who is completely outside the created order of things, and as based on the nature of man which is unchangeable by man. The notion of conscience as an 'inner voice', or 'inner light', was strictly subordinated to the notion of morality as legislation made by a Supreme Being; the purpose of the inner light was to see the obligations which came, ultimately, from an external source; the basic obligation was to know what was decreed by the will of God. Many of the obligations were looked on as coming from the very nature of man himself (*e.g.*, the fact that he is a creature imposes the obligation to adore the Creator, the nature of the faculty of speech imposes the obligation to refrain from lying). From this objectivity follow two consequences: that certain actions are intrinsically evil (*i.e.*, apart from their social or other results, fornication being wrong in itself even though it might lead to no offspring); and violation of the moral law results in corruption of the mind and character.[2] At the same time, the objectivity was quite compatible with

[2]Medieval moralists distinguished carefully between (a) the *natural* law which following necessarily from the nature of God or of man cannot be changed (*e.g.*, that God should be adored) and (b) the *positive* law which merely defines a particular way of fulfilling a natural obligation (*e.g.*, Thou shalt adore God on the seventh day). It was especially the violation of the natural law which was considered as corrupting since it is an attempt to violate the natural order of the universe.

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subjectivity in the sense that, in a concrete case, what a man is obliged to do is what he honestly *believes* himself obliged to.

This phase of morality Shakespeare modified by developing it; as was necessary in plays, he put more emphasis on the subjective side (without ever implying that morality is merely a matter for the individual to settle for himself, or that man is really autonomous, a law unto himself). He also put a great deal of emphasis on the psychological consequences of evil, on what happens inside man through the victory of evil over good, especially in *Macbeth* and *Antony*. The ideal critic (possessing a thorough knowledge of medieval theology and of Elizabethan drama) could, I believe, give a very interesting account of the use Shakespeare makes of the medieval doctrine of original sin in the two plays mentioned, and occasionally elsewhere, but the topic is too full of both fine technicalities and huge issues to pursue here. It may be remembered, however, that Shakespeare's tragedies are the eminently sane and balanced studies of human nature they are largely because they avoid the 17th century (and later) beliefs in inevitable progress, and because they employ neither a Puritan belief in the thorough corruption of man nor a Rousseauistic dream of the naturally good savage (a dream which can hardly have been quite unknown to Shakespeare since it is at least adumbrated in *Utopia*). Shakespeare made good dramatic use of the belief that very few men are thoroughly evil, and no man is thoroughly good.

The other quality of the medieval ethic was its reference to eternal values. The moral law was looked on essentially as a guide towards the possession of eternal goods; yet the law was also concerned with temporal things, considered as means towards the eternal and as the concrete expression of the Divine Will. It was here that Shakespeare made his widest modifications. As a playwright, he is not interested in what happens to man after he dies—in this he is obviously very different from the Moralities. He leaves the eternal out of account in the sense that he does not pursue his characters beyond the grave. Yet he employs references to a future life in so far as it suits his purposes—to make the portrait of Hamlet complex, to clarify the picture of the tortured mind of Macbeth; the absence of such reference is one means by which he builds up an impression of grossness in Antony; and to an Elizabethan audience Cleopatra's complaint:

> If she first meet the curled Antony,
> He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss
> Which is my heaven to have,

with its calm assumption of a heaven to follow immediately on suicide would, I believe, be full of irony; it also underlines the shallowness which clings to Cleopatra in spite of her being 'cunning past man's thought'. Shakespeare was not fascinated by Cleopatra as Symonds was.

But besides the immediate purpose which may be served by references to eternity, there are two general ways in which they are

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important dramatically: they help to give greater significance to human choice and conduct, and they help to maintain in a concrete form the sense of mystery in the universe. One idea which he inherited from the Middle Ages and of which he made good dramatic use is that the mind of man can apprehend, but not comprehend, the design of the universe and the greatness of the Providence which created and runs it.[3] Shakespeare was interested, as few have ever been, in human conduct; as he grew in dramatic power, he perceived more and more clearly that conduct cannot be made into great drama if moral and cosmic considerations are completely omitted. The medieval mind could not accept the simplifications of either the 18th or the 19th centuries. A restricting pragmatism is already apparent in Bacon.[4] The practical view is more noticeable in Pope and Addison, where morality tends to become identified, not with divine legislation, but with strictly human concepts of decorum, of accepted standards which, even in principle, leave *private* actions out of account. The 18th century concentrates on social well-being; the pragmatism of the 19th century ends by denying eternal well-being. Shakespeare, on the other hand, manages to have the best of both worlds; he has all the poignancy, the intensity, the immediacy, which can belong only to experience in this world; he has all the profundity of mystery, the depth of significance, the immensely ranging issues which come to the human mind only when it sees time in relation to eternity. And it is a mark of his completely artistic handling of eternity that, while he is drawing constantly on the medieval ethic, we have so rarely the feeling so common in Milton, that we need to know a good deal about the religion supposed in order to enjoy the poetry; Shakespeare himself keeps alive as much of that religion as we need.

Among his unobtrusive triumphs in this line is the use he makes of the belief in hell. This notion is so foreign to modern thought that it requires more than ordinary detachment from self to see its importance in relation to Shakespearean tragedy. But, even keeping within reasonably simple limits, we may see its dramatic usefulness. For the dramatist considers action or choice as significant in proportion to the vastness of its consequences, and it is no accident that in the super-plays, *Antony* and *Lear* (where his genius is so supple and so much at ease), he makes the field of action so vast. The belief in hell habituated the mind of the audience to the notion that the consequences of some actions, some choices, are endless. Belief in such tremendous consequences fixed

[3]Marlowe was the spokesman of the new science, rather than of the old philosophy, when he spoke of the 'faculties which can comprehend the wondrous architecture of the world'.

[4]In reading the Essays, however, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between abstraction from, and denial of, eternal issues. If Bacon concentrates on the temporal, he does so in a definite way—with the assumption that there are others to look after man's eternal concerns.

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a particular kind of attention and interest on temporal action, an intenser insight into motives and inclinations which precede, as well as consequences which follow, deliberate choice. Most of the interest and insight survives even when hell is lost sight of; and much of it can survive (for a while) even when hell is denied—in something of the way in which interest in the English monarchy survives even when the monarch is separated from the politico-economic world in which kingship once got its meaning. Thus, the original doctrine of hell maintained the sense of the *intrinsic* evil of certain forms of immorality, the sense of the *inner corruption* which evil brings about (in proportion to the repetition of the evil act or to the intensity of the evil desire), and the sense of the *reverberations* of evil (the consequences of suffering inflicted on others than the evil doer). As regards the reverberations, we may remember that people of any religion in Shakespeare's time believed in the two great pivotal choices in the history of mankind—the free choice of Adam sinning (and thereby inflicting grave losses and suffering on all mankind) and Christ redeeming (and thereby obtaining Redemption for all). When we add to these notions the conception of hell as the final, irrevocable frustration of all desire and of all opportunity, we have a mental climate in which it is possible, and in a sense inevitable, for drama to invest human action and choice with significance.

We must, then, free ourselves from the modern misconception which considers medieval morality as a set of rather arbitrary rules made by an authoritarian God who rewards the docile and inflicts brutal tortures on the recalcitrant—a misconception which Milton has done more perhaps than anyone else to spread. There was undoubtedly a belief in a divine Authority which could dispense eternal rewards and punishments; but as the medieval hymns, even the stern *Dies Irae*, clearly show, this belief was secondary to the main inculcation of love.[5] The universe as a whole was the expression of Divine Love; the law was the expression of the manner in which man can come to enjoy the effects of Divine Love in the highest degree. Dante was most faithful to the medieval spirit when he ascribed the creation of hell to the *Sommo Amore*. For hell was looked on not so much as a wilful punishment inflicted from outside man, but rather as the natural result of ultimate refusal to meet God on terms of love. No one can make his own heaven (since it is the perfect, and endless, fulfilment of all desire), but anyone can make his own hell, since hell consists essentially in being left with the limited created good which the evil will has preferred to the Infinite Good. As Santayana has pointed out, Paolo even in hell retains his adulterous Francesca. A view which considers human actions and choices as having consequences in eternity is a view which, considered in itself, is likely to create far greater

[5]In the delicate balance of justice and mercy, of fear and confidence, in the *Dies Irae*, we have a literary art worthy of comparison with the subtlest effects in Shakespeare's mature verse.

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interest in human action than contrasting views, and it thereby helps to produce an atmosphere favourable and stimulating to the dramatist.

The medieval conviction of the significance of human action survived in one very definite, and dramatically manageable, manner—in the belief in a temporal analogue to hell. The authentic hell consisted in perpetual exclusion from the benign effects of Infinite Goodness, the pain consisting largely of the realization that the exclusion was the direct result of one's own deliberate action; it was the waste, the final and irrevocable frustration, of great talents and opportunities. The analogous hell was the waste and frustration of temporal opportunities, the particularly intense misery which man brings on himself. Man might go a long way towards making a hell on earth; lechery was the perverted, frustrated abuse of the body (or rather, the abuse of the free control of the body by the will); pride was the abuse of the highest power, the intellect. The medieval mind, and certainly Shakespeare's, was too penetrating to subscribe to any facile belief that 'crime does not pay'; in both, however, there was a belief that certain forms of conduct are intrinsically evil and productive of horrible corruption *without* man.[6]

We are as yet only in the beginnings of human ecology; the ecology of various art forms is a vast field for which there is an abundance of material but in which there are very few, even tentative, conclusions. But it is clear that drama is likely to flourish in some environments and likely to languish (into triviality or sterility) in others. The whole justification for examining the medieval ethic is the hope of disentangling some of the elements which helped to make the great tragedies possible and to make them popular. Where human life is conceived as simply governed by material forces, or as wholly determined by outside forces, or as simply directed towards obtaining wealth, power or pleasure, or as simply ending at death, the soil is unsuitable to the growing of tragedy. And the metaphor of 'growing' may be pushed very far, since tragedy can no more be made than a particular kind of apple or wheat can be made—all that men can do is to provide the suitable conditions in which, by a true natural spontaneity, the organism itself will look after its own growth. Great art, like a great spruce or oak, cannot be produced by 'taking thought' alone. And among the conditions which the individual artist cannot produce, we may note communal or traditional beliefs. For example, to take away all analogy between self-made suffering in this world and self-made suffering in eternity is to rob the dramatist's material of its richest meaning.

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[6]This is found also, of course, in the Greeks; but in them it is less fruitful dramatically because their notions of the gods were cruder, because they thought of the gods themselves as subject to fate, and because they never managed to articulate a doctrine of the universe as a whole into which this notion could be fitted. From this point of view, *Ajax* is inferior to *Macbeth*.

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For if a play is to appear really valuable to us, even from the literary or dramatic point of view, then the events and situations in the play must appear in some manner and to some degree to reach beyond themselves into our own lives and situations; the appeal, the meaning of a play, are very restricted if the play seems merely a few hours in the private lives of some people other than ourselves. When the dramatist finds an audience believing that every deliberate human action reaches beyond itself in relation to a cosmological conception of value, he has an audience ready to see significance in conduct, ready to follow the intricate interactions of intellect, will and outside circumstances. Shakespeare does in an eminent degree what all good playwrights aim at—he points beyond the immediate characters to the larger world of humanity. There is nothing merely private about their sufferings and catastrophe. If he was able to do this in an unusual degree, it was largely because he was able, in an unusual degree, to make dramatic use of the feeling in his audience that 'no man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself'.[7]

The other quality in the medieval ethic to which I would like to direct attention is what, for convenience sake, I shall call the fourth dimension of human conduct. The two dimensions of length and breadth may be thought of as the mere extension of experience —the knowledge which widens constantly even in the most superficial mind; depth is the more penetrating knowledge of things already known (as *e.g.*, a grasp of history clarifies the present which we knew before we learnt the history). In Shakespeare and in the whole cast of the medieval mind, there is the constant supposition of a fourth dimension—the relation of human choice to the supra-

[7]While the later history of religion does not concern us here, it is worth noting that the idea of human happiness which Arnold attacked in *Doing As One Likes* was as disastrous artistically as it was socially. It was only towards the end of the 19th century that the full effects of *laissez-faire* became apparent in poetry. The romantic revival is usually believed to have come about the end of the 18th century; but the people for whom Wordsworth wrote were very much the same as Pope had in mind—the 'joy in widest commonalty spread' springs from the same conception of man and society as Pope's 'imperial works worthy of kings' which benefit the whole society. It is in Tennyson, in Arnold himself, and in the false autonomy given to the artist by Pre-Raphaelitism that we find the poet becoming really a recluse. The medieval *mundi fuga*, separated from its religious context, turns rapidly into the Ivory Tower where the artist can shut out disharmony and ugliness, and devote himself to the contemplation of a disembodied 'beauty'. It is very interesting to note that the major poet of the 20th century endeavours in his first major work to present a cyclorama of society, and that his work has had an increased impact on the modern mind as men have become more conscious (I do not say, more intelligently perceptive) of the unity of the human race.

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human world, principally the divine forces, but also the angelic and the demonic.

Throughout the thinking of the Middle Ages, there was the pervasive feeling that human conduct takes place in a set of circumstances which are what they are partly by human planning, but partly and principally by divine planning. The 'divinity which shapes our ends' is conceived as guiding all things to an ultimate result foreknown by Infinite Wisdom and executed by Infinite Power. Such guidance, far from conflicting with human free will, actually employs and directs free will, making of it one of the agents which fulfil the divine plan. Besides (and this is a point of capital importance for the tragic artist), limited human intelligence cannot know fully what the results of human action will be. The great plays—*Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Lear, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus*—show us an outcome which, when realized, is seen to have been inevitable yet freely brought about. There is an unseen and uncontrollable power which, without compelling the human will, governs the result of human action in an infallible manner.[8] Such a 'fourth dimension', however mysterious at any time, however dissonant with popular beliefs to-day, is very serviceable to the dramatist; it helps, far better than any denial of free will or of divine governance, to create poignant situations and profound character studies; with the evidence of Shakespeare's tragedies in mind, we must admit that the belief, even if false, still helps to present a fuller, more accurate picture of what man is actually like than anything that has since taken its place. Neither Spencer's formula of 'blood and soil', nor Shaw's version of Creative Evolution can supply as effective, as organizing a concept for tragedy as the medieval Providence.

As agents in human affairs, the medieval mind also accepted angels and demons; these were never looked on, even by as sceptical and querying a mind as Scotus, as mere personifications or mental embodiments of the powers of good and evil within man; they were thought of as real, intelligent substances, lower than the divine but

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[8] I do not think it would be relevant to discuss any of the many attempts from Augustine to Molina to show there is no contradiction between Divine Omnipotence and human freedom. The main point here is that the problem was recognized, compatibility accepted, and accepted as profoundly mysterious. It is, however, interesting to note the parallel between the general principle of Augustine (Noli cogitare te invitum trahi; trahitur animus et amore. . . . Trahit quemque sua voluptas, non necessitas sed delectatio) and

> He . . . hates himself for his offence;
> He runs, and chides his vanish'd, loath'd delight.
>
> (*Lucrece*, 106.)

The concupiscence which urges a man to do what he loathes was taken by the medieval mind as one indication that other forces besides free will act on man. *Cf. Paradiso*, XVII. 37-42.

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much more powerful than man, as able to communicate some of their powers to men, as able to league themselves to men to accomplish certain forms of good or evil. The fullest use of this belief is made in *Macbeth,* perhaps the most sensible treatise on demonology in the language. It is Banquo who speaks for the more sane and balanced medieval view on man's dealings with the demons:

> Oftentimes to win us to our harms,
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray 's
> In deepest consequence.

The 'instruments of darkness' (a biblical allusion) are not only the witches, but also the 'murdering ministers', and 'metaphysical aid' which Macbeth and his wife believe to be as real as themselves. But the presence and the action of these 'instruments' is felt in other plays, for the tragedies are built on the contemporary belief that human events are shaped by various rational and personal forces of which man is only one.[9] Such a way of considering his work takes us closer to the inner core of his art than any statistics about his versification or imagery, closer even than the literary criticism which (like, *e.g.,* Murry's) considers the imagery apart from the framework of ideas and suppositions. For his great problem in the tragedies was to develop a language which would be adequate to an immense task; the task of presenting concretely the general complexity of human action and motive, suggesting a three-dimensioned solidity of characters acting in a particular way for particular motives, and at the same time indicating the fourth dimension of other rational forces which, by their very nature, cannot be fully defined nor turned into mere 'characters' like Athena in the *Ajax.* Not only does he find space in his plays for a huge variety of disposition and motive; he also accommodates to strictly dramatic form almost the complete range of religious beliefs of his time. The profoundest psychology and the completest theology are made to reinforce each other.

It was by such incorporation of popular beliefs into dramatic art that Shakespeare solved a problem which concerned him (I suspect) much more than it has his critics—the problem of reconciling the claims of his own genius and training on the one hand with the difficulties he accepted in bidding for popular favour on the other. He would appear to have begun working in a frame of mind rather similar to Sidney's, which thought of popular taste mainly as an obstacle to the sensitive and subtle artist. In *A Comedy of Errors,* in *Love's Labour's Lost,* and in *Titus Andronicus,* there appear to be traces of aristocratic taste (coming perhaps from Southampton and his circle). But with his immense powers of observation, he perceived in the popular language and

[9] I use the word *personal* in its medieval sense; a *person* is any substance possessing intelligence, whether human, angelic or divine.

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the popular beliefs great possibilities for the development of dramatic art. He succeeded, both as a businessman and as an artist, in much the same way as Elizabeth and her ministers succeeded in making the Reformation permanent—by incorporating into the work to be done as much as possible of interests, attitudes and ideas which were already centuries old. To lead the populace to new heights of dramatic appreciation, his base of operations was that part of the popular mind which was most readily brought into play, and most instinctive with the Elizabethans. We can see here that to apply medieval ideas to our understanding of Shakespearean tragedy is no mere matter of supplying footnotes to particular lines or references; it is a matter of grasping a whole mentality which is implicit, and often explicit, in the plays. It is, however, characteristic of Shakespeare's sense of good structure that the mentality makes itself tangible and examinable in particular places, the places in which the mentality is expressed in terms of particular characters acting in particular circumstances.

Macbeth is not the only, but it is the most extensive and the most interesting example of fusing deep psychology, wide theology, with dramatic talent. The special quality of the play lies largely in the poet's power to make *night* mean so many things, to make it so rich in sugestiveness.[10] As indicated in a previous article, this implies much more than mere symbolism, for it supposes a power to relate the physical thing, night, to a whole world of suprasensible forces which, dramatically, is as real as night itself. The play supposes in Shakespeare an imagination which may be called philosophical with no less right than Dante's—though in a very different way and for distinct poetic purposes. The settling of the final gloom is appropriately expressed as the extinction of light: 'out, out, brief candle'. Night's candles are indeed burnt out for Macbeth; the savage pessimism is worded far more effectively than any pessimist has managed to word it; the previous prayer that heaven might not peep through the blanket of the dark has been granted in full to Macbeth as well as to his wife. Convention required that Macbeth should die at the end of the play; dramatic neatness required that his wife should die before him. But through the constant reference to the more than human powers that are at work, their deaths are given a vaster significance than could be attained by any mere convention or technical skill; their deaths are the final

[10]Here again is an indication of the measure of the distance between Shakespeare's genius and Milton's. In the perfectly restrained invocation to Light at the opening of *Paradise Lost,* Book III, we find Milton drawing on exactly the same sources as Shakespeare—the deep and varied significance with which the Bible invests the notions of light and darkness. But Shakespeare's subtler effects of irony and contrast (so delicately implicit), the impinging of a whole cosmic system on the individual mind, and the exact integration of these effects into the poetic structure. have really no parallel in Milton.

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answer to their double prayer: 'Come, thick night, and pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell'; 'Come, seeling night, scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day'. The final agony is the infernal agony of realizing that they have brought their misery upon themselves. 'All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand'; this, we remember, is the hand which guilded the faces of the grooms; it is his own communion with evil, Macbeth reflects, which has seared his life so that

> That which should accompany old age,
> I must not look to have.

So well is the traditional philosophy fitted into the dramatic scheme that it is transformed into the dramatic situation; hardly a word of the traditional language of morality appears; but the whole concept of the corruption of Macbeth and his wife is essentially moral. His mental gloom and her madness are the inevitable revenge of nature on the evil doer, the recoil of a nature which rebels against abuse. The play is the affirmation, by strictly dramatic means, that violence to nature (the murder of kinsman, king, benefactor, the dealing with unholy powers), subjects a man to that judgment which 'we still have here', even if we are willing to jump the consequences of the life to come. Even apart from eternity, nature exacts a penalty, for nature (the order created by Providence) is above man. The nihilism, the madness, the last burst of furious energy are felt to be the inevitable consequences of the earlier, deliberate evil, consequences as inevitable, as 'natural', as weariness after toil or hunger after fasting.

The special tragic quality of the play draws constantly on three principles essential to the medieval ethic: the connection between the moral and the intellectual orders; the objectivity of the moral order; and the notion of impenitence as the supreme moral evil. In the medieval conception, morality is essentially intellectual.[11] The play as a whole may be considered as a commentary on

> le genti dolorose
> c' hanno perduto il ben dell' intelletto.
>
> (the wretched people
> who have sacrificed the good of the intellect.)

For 'il vero e lo bene dello 'ntelletto' (Conv. II, 13); the special good or perfection of the intellect is truth. The desire of Macbeth and his wife for darkness, for the aid of night in their wickedness, is really a desire for moral blindness ('let not light see my black and deep desires'); the whole strenuous effort to 'screw their courage to the sticking place' is really an attempt to pervert their moral sense so that what is foul may appear fair; they reject the 'good of the

[11]Summa Theol. I. Q. 79, art. 13: Conscience is an act by which we direct our knowledge towards those things which ought to be done or ought not to be done. I. IIae. Q. 19. art. 5: Every intention which is discordant with right reason is always evil.

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intellect'. This gives all the more point to the demonology of the play, since the devil was believed to be a 'liar and the father of lies', or as Macbeth translates it, 'a juggling fiend paltering with us in a double sense'.

Similarly, the play would be imposible without the supposition that the moral law is objective, that man makes his deliberate choices within a framework of moral laws which spring from the objective nature of man and of his relations to the universe. Man, being free, can violate the law; but the law, being objective, continues to operate on man; to defy the law in one way is to submit to it in another. If the law which commands temperance in the use of bodily pleasures is violated, the body corrupts:

> If he filled
> His vacancy with his voluptuousness,
> Full surfeits and the dryness of his bones
> Call on him for 't. (*Antony*, I. iv.)

If the law of justice is violated, the mind corrupts. Seen in this way, Lady Macbeth's quiet dismissal of consequences:

> A little water clears us of this deed

is profoundly ironical, because it expresses the delusion that they can not only break the moral law, but also that they can defy all consequences coming from the moral order as a whole. In the end, the punishment comes not from outside, from righteous invading armies, but from within themselves. And Shakespeare shows himself a very perceptive theologian, because the characters and guilt of the two are not the same, and the inevitable consequences are correspondingly different.

He carries his theological analysis further, because he makes the play a study in impenitence. To the medieval mind, impenitence was the supreme evil, since it implies, what no individual evil act of itself implies, the final loss of all enjoyable good, the complete frustration of all desire. As we know from Claudius in *Hamlet*, repentance becomes difficult in proportion as evil puts us in possession of good which we do not like to surrender: the king cannot pray for forgiveness 'since he is still possessed of those effects for which he did the murder'. It is worth noting that first among these effects he mentions the crown—kingly power is for him, as for Macbeth, very difficult to lay down. Repentance becomes difficult also in proportion to the full, intense deliberateness of the sinner. It is part of Shakespeare's skill as a poet-dramatist that he can place the murder so early in the play (one-third through the second act), yet so reinforce the impression that, with all the hesitations, it is fully, deliberately willed. Repentance becomes still more difficult in proportion as the sinner wilfully blinds himself.[12] The form which

[12]There is an old story that it was a French saint who was originally responsible for the practice of marking bawdy houses with a red light—with the purpose that no one could deceive himself on his reason for entering them.

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rejection of the good of the intellect takes in Macbeth and his wife is calculated self-deception. Such rejection is closely bound up with the inevitable operating of the natural moral law: it makes more difficult the operation within man of any of the benign influences of nature. It is not so much by murder alone, but by self-deception that Macbeth discharges from himself the 'milk of human kindness' of which he was once full. His appeal to the stars to hide their fires, his wife's appeal to the murdering ministers to unsex her are granted far more fully than they had dreamt of or wished for

So far, we have been dealing with medieval concepts which were commonplaces to Shakespeare's audience. There is another aspect which, I think, would be perceived by the intelligent Elizabethan—the echoes in the play of the story of the first man and woman. Shakespeare's great effort was to present human choices in their most profound aspects. The medieval ethic saw all human actions as replicas either of Adam sinning or of Christ redeeming. The *Imitation of Christ* is particularly based on the doctrine of the 'old Adam' who lives on in every human being. The principle that 'no man liveth to himself or dieth to himself' meant not only the practice of brotherly love towards neighbours; it implied the vast reverberations of actions, both good and evil. Some of the basic elements in the Adam story and in the Macbeth story (in Shakespeare's version, rather than in Holinshed's) are very similar: the suggestion of evil from outside demonic forces, the fully deliberate choice of evil which seems good for the time being, the tremendous, though unseen, consequences of the desire for power—'you shall be as gods' in the Adam story is parallel to the hope that their act

> Shall for all our nights and days to come
> Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

The dramatic irony here supposes that we link the desire for power with both the increasing hold of evil on Macbeth's mind (and the consequent diminution of power over himself) and with the madness which robs Lady Macbeth of reason, the very source of power over oneself. This is almost exactly the medieval doctrine that the power of concupiscence over man (the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life) comes from Adam's rejection of the objective divine law.

It is, then, not to Machiavelli's prince alone that we must go to find the prototype for Macbeth. His ancestry goes back to Adam, and the play gains greatly by the new depth which enters when the medieval is added to the Renaissance understanding of man. Richard III, like Tamburlaine, is a Renaissance figure, the dramatic embodiment of the lust for power, conceived and drawn entirely within the limits of the Renaissance concentration on human affairs, the human aspects of human choice and conduct. The basic dramatic defect in both plays is a defect of philosophical vision—the failure to see that no tyrant, however resolute or bloody, makes his own world. The defeat of Richard III is merely extraneous;

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for the mind which dwells in that twisted body is twisted too; its glee in doing evil is indeed elevated (as a hundred critics have noted) by the pervasive Shakespearean energy which can make an artistic success of almost anything. But that twisted mind is incapable of seeing (as I suspect Shakespeare was at the time of writing) the true nature of the evil that is at work in the heart of the lustful man. Similarly, the dramatic success which relies on Barabbas' bold defiance:

> Soul, curse thy fill and die,

is a success which pleases at a relatively superficial level; it has no conviction of the true horror of evil, no conviction of the reality of hell, of the hell which the evil man builds in his own heart and mind. Hard as he tried, Milton did not manage to revive, for himself or for his reader, that conviction of the reality of hell; he is almost completely reduced to thinking of it in terms of physical torture inflicted from the outside.

There is, indeed, no direct reference to the Adam story in *Macbeth* (except perhaps in: 'Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it') nor could the parallel be worked out in detail. But the significance of the Macbeth story is possible largely because Shakespeare lived in a world which accepted simply as fact the story of an original man and woman seeking greatness unlawfully, suffering from their own unlawful act, and involving others in their suffering. In any case, the effective art of *Macbeth* and, *servatis servandis*, of the other tragedies, is built out of two things: the stimulating and clarifying moral conceptions prevalent in Elizabethan England, and Shakespeare's increasing power to turn those conceptions to dramatic account.

The system of morality supposed in the play is not a simplified formula of rewards and punishments; it does not lend itself to any naïve summary like: 'Crime does not pay'. There is no need to suppose Shakespeare ignorant of the fact that many evil men die quietly and peacefully in their beds—it is not only the 'virtuous men' who 'pass mildly away'. But for Shakespeare, as for Dante, the punishment for such men is, in a sense, worse than that for Macbeth; the very insensibility which enables them to live in a spurious peace lowers them to the brutes. One might say that Shakespeare excludes them from his plays in much the same spirit as Dante excludes them from heaven and from hell, for they are the vast army of the morally mediocre:

> Questo misero modo
> tengon l'anime tristi di coloro,
> che visser senza infamia e senza lodo. . . . .
> Cacciarli i ciel per non esser men belli,
> ne lo profondo inferno gli riceve,
> che alcuna gloria i rei avrebber d'elli. ((Inf. III 34.)

(This is the miserable lot of those wretched souls who lived without blame and without praise. Heaven chased them forth to

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keep its beauty unimpaired, and deep hell refuses to receive them, for the wicked themselves can boast superiority to such as these.)

It is not of the mediocre that great tragedy is made. In *Macbeth* Shakespeare chose to present a man and a woman to whom the moral distinction between good and evil is absolutely valid and profoundly disturbing, two human beings cast essentially in the medieval mould to whom moral evil is an intensely felt reality and an abomination—in itself and not merely on account of its 'anti-social' effects; they are the two most perfect examples Shakespeare has given us of human beings deliberately, wilfully choosing evil knowing it to be evil. Their fully conscious choice of evil is indicated most strikingly, most dramatically, by their invocation of the preternatural forces of evil. It is by this invocation that Shakespeare conveys the whole medieval ethic which always thought of sin in a cosmic manner, as something which has its meaning only in relation to the total plan designed by Divine Providence.

Where the Shakespearean and the Dantesque lines of thought meet is in the conception of peace which is as cosmic as sin. 'Our peace is in the Divine Will' (Par. III 85) from which comes all harmony and all law; the attempt to violate that harmony destroys peace within the sinner. Macbeth in his ambition 'puts rancours in the vessel of his peace', and while he lives must 'on the torture of the mind lie in restless ecstacy'. It can hardly be by pure accident that the language here is almost exactly the opposite of Dante's description of the joy of heaven, *e.g.*,

> vita integra d'amore and di pace,
> senza brama sicura ricchezza. (Par XXVII 8.)
>
> (a life compact[13] of love and peace,
> secure abundance which stays all further longing.)

Both Macbeth's restless ecstasy and Dante's peaceful ecstasy are echoes (very probably deliberate in Dante) of the great phrase of Augustine: 'Fecisti nos ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te'.

The futile fury of the last burst of energy ('Yet I will try the last') is basically the same mood as the passive nihilism of 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow'. The passivity and the furious energy are alike the result of the defiance of the moral law, a law conceived by the author as profoundly complex and as an integral part of the whole scheme of the universe. The perfect structure of *Macbeth*, like the perfectly integrated plan of the *Commedia*, springs from a grasp of the perfect order established by a Divine Providence.[14]

From such application of moral ideas to dramatic art arises another quality which is full of interest—the distinctly Shakespearean

[13]The Dent Dante (Paradiso, p. 326) has the somewhat weaker *intera* in place of *integra*; the latter is closer to medieval theological terminology.

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evaluation of human conduct. Precision is necessary here if we are to avoid attributing to Shakespeare what he did not attempt, and at the same time see clearly what he did achieve. The plays are more than profound psychological reporting on human conduct, and they fall short, to exactly the degree desired by Shakespeare, of moral didactics.

Shakespeare worked in a tradition which inherited from the ancients a power of telling a story in such a way as to imply judgments on the relative value of the characters and forms of conduct. Most of the great stories, from the Genesis account of Adam to the *Aeneid* and Matthew's Gospel, imply the presence in the writer's mind of standards which, even apart from strictly moral considerations, help us to evaluate ourselves and the forces at work within us. They proceed from more than psychological insight because they do not merely report, they imply *degrees* of nobility, of fineness of sensitivity, of depth and complexity of mind—degrees which can be validly distinguished apart from moral principles. The penetrating observation of conduct apparent in the *Aeneid* or *Julius Caesar* evokes from the reader not only a fuller understanding of human beings, but also a keener insight into the forms of excellence (and their degrees) possible to man in this world, and a corresponding sense of how far individuals fall short of that excellence.[15] Shakespeare's tragedies are thus in a category quite distinct from *The Arabian Nights* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which pretend to no interest beyond mere story-telling. It was to this evaluating type of writing that Shakespeare was increasingly drawn from 1600 on, and it was in developing this type that he perfected his style. *Macbeth* is a greater play than *Tamburlaine* or *Richard III*, partly because it is more acutely aware of a hierarchy of values; the contemplation of man and conduct from which it springs is completer. *Macbeth* has subtler rhythms, more complex diction, because such language is necessary to the fuller vision into man which the play presents. On the one hand, Shakespeare does not teach morality, because morality (in the medieval and Elizabethan conceptions) sees everything *sub specie aeternitatis*. On the other, he does not present practical wisdom suitable merely for the temporal sphere. What he *does* present is very difficult to describe in general terms, since nothing less than the language of a given play is adequate to express the meaning of the play. But, as a rule, Shakespeare's own

[14]It is, I hope superfluous to point out that there is a large difference between a grasp of perfect order and a perfect grasp of that order; the order was conceived as profoundly mysterious, and consequently incapable of being perfectly understood outside eternity.

[15]Some of the confusion in Sidney's *Apology* is due to a failure to note that, while great fiction evaluates, it need not evaluate in a strictly moral way. We ourselves, however, must remain somewhat confused, because we have no terminology to deal adequately with this phase of experience which is between the merely psychological and the strictly ethical.

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work is the best introduction to Shakespeare, and we can help ourselves towards understanding the morality of the later plays through *Julius Caesar*.

By an instinct compounded of artistic talent and shrewd sense, Shakespeare confined himself in *Caesar* to what he could then achieve—namely, present a penetrating insight into man as a political animal. Here he brings a profound and subtle sagacity to bear on a situation which has engaged the attention of both moralists and practising politicians, namely, the tendency of the overthrow of a dictator to create a scramble to inherit his power. The play is obviously a great advance on *Titus*, marking the full liberation of Shakespeare from the notion that tragedy must be tragedy of blood. To achieve his large task, he simplifies it; in particular, he keeps the conspiracy a strictly aristocratic affair, and he whittles down the character of Caesar. A full, or even an accurate, portrait of Caesar would present difficulties which do not occur in the case of the other characters. The political action is kept uncluttered throughout; the play has neither the wide scope of *Antony* nor the intensity of *Coriolanus*. Yet this simple framework is merely a means towards presenting clearly a very complex and constantly changing situation. Apart from Caesar (who hardly 'does' anything), there are four politicians who represent, severally, four approaches to political problems. None of these, with the characteristic exception of Octavius, remains in the same mood for more than a few moments at a time, yet they remain completely self-consistent—not merely in the character portrayal (in the conventional sense of the phrase) but also in the way they subverse the political commentary which the play as a whole presents. There is, for example, an extraordinary contrast between the apparent simplicity of the language and the complex functions which the language is performing. In diction which is well adapted not only to the Elizabethan audience but also to the ordinary schoolboy to-day, we find a penetrating portrait of what politics is actually like as contrasted with what it appears to be. Even in the opening scene, we find a fairly complete sketch of the methods—the shifts and dodges, the mixture of reason, prejudice and emotion, the consecrated terminology, the 'party-line'—employed by the ordinary mediocre politician in a difficulty, a sketch of the resistance of ordinary sensible humanity to such methods and its eventual surrender to them. We have here an excellent example of the quality mentioned above—the various levels of intelligibility: an ordinary schoolboy can, as I have seen demonstrated, get much of the political meaning, while an advanced politician can also learn from it.

The play as a whole keeps us in touch, constantly and clearly, with an uncertain, slippery political situation, for it is built out of the way the mind and character work when handling the practical problems of politics; there is recourse neither to romantic idealism nor to slick cynicism but a constant feeling that neither the demagogue nor the idealist can find a perfect solution for political

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problems. The plan of the play rests not so much on the succession of events, but rather on the closely integrated portraits of the four major politicians, each of whom helps us to understand the others. We see, for example, the peculiar simplicity and superficiality which clings to the smaller mind in politics—not so much by what Antony or Cassius says, but by the unobtrusive comment on them supplied by their contrast with Brutus and Octavius—the audience is much more aware of the limitations of all four than they themselves are. We see the strong and multiple cross-currents at work even in the simpler minds; we see the impossibility of the idealist accomplishing anything by himself and the consequent role (even in the most idealistic schemes) of the ordinary, selfish, short-sighted, practical person. We see the strong tendency of certain political conditions to throw power into the hands of certain types of men—mob rule brings the Antonys to the top (at least for the time being) as inevitably as it makes rule impossible for the Brutuses.

A similar account, necessarily more expanded, could be given of the later tragedies which remain the profoundest and completest studies in our language of the varieties and complexities of human motive, character and conduct. Without indicating details, I would suggest the following as the important considerations from the present point of view: (a) the growth in style and in dramatic craft is closely correlated to the growing power to enrich dramatic material by seeing it in relation to cosmic and ethical considerations; (b) the special light he throws on human beings, the special evaluation by which he surpassed the Greeks and his contemporaries springs from a developed ability to use the medieval morality. One may doubt whether the English language, with the traditions it embodies, was equal to the task which Milton attempted in *Paradise Lost*; Shakespeare's perfection is largely a perfection of practical judgment—he made the fullest use of ancient and medieval tradition, while stopping short at exactly the right point prescribed by his own talents and artistic experience, and by the nature of the language in which he worked.

L. A. CORMICAN.

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THE NOVEL AS DRAMATIC POEM (V):

'WOMEN IN LOVE' (II)

THE episode takes place during Gerald's initiatory visit, as Birkin's guest, to 'London Bohemia' (for this representative world of the intelligentsia, pungently evoked, has its place in Lawrence's wonderfully comprehensive presentment of contemporary England). In the house in Soho there are 'several statues, woodcarvings from the West Pacific, strange and disturbing . . .' Gerald takes Birkin up to one of these and demands his opinion on it:

> ' "Why is it art?" Gerald asked, shocked, resentful.
>
> "It conveys a complete truth," said Birkin. "It contains the whole truth of that state, whatever you feel about it."
>
> "But you can't call it *high* art," said Gerald.
>
> "High! There are centuries and hundreds of centuries of development in a straight line, behind that carving: it is an awful pitch of culture of a definite sort".
>
> "What culture?" Gerald asked, in opposition. He hated the sheer barbaric thing.
>
> "Pure culture in sensation, culture in the physical consciousness, really ultimate *physical* consciousness, mindless, utterly sensual. It is so sensual as to be final, supreme".
>
> But Gerald resented it. He wanted to keep certain illusions, certain ideas like clothing'.

The figure that repels him draws him with a certain fascination too; that is made plain to us. 'He saw Minette in it', we are told, significantly. Minette is he artist's model with whom he is carrying on a casual *liaison*. And a Minette, we come to learn, is one of the habitual remedies to which Gerald resorts when, as happens more and more, the drive fails in him, and he is 'emptily restless, utterly hollow', 'suspended motionless, in an agony of inertia, like a machine that is without power'.

The significance is sharpened and developed in various ways as the chapters succeed one another. There is, notably, the passage in chapter XIX ('Moony') that Middleton Murry cites as supporting the argument of *Son of Woman*. The figure from West Africa that Birkin recalls has the same intended force as the figure that fascinated Gerald:

> 'He remembered her vividly; she was one of his soul's intimates. Her body was long and elegant, her face crushed tiny like a beetle's, she had rows of round heavy collars, like a column of quoits, on her neck. He remembered her; her astonishing cul-

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tured elegance, her diminished, beetle face, the astounding long elegant body, on short, ugly legs, with such protuberant buttocks, so weighty and unexpected below her slim long loins. She knew what he himself did not know. She had thousands of years of purely sensual, purely unspiritual knowledge behind her. It must have been thousands of years since her race died, mystically: that is, since the relation between the senses and the outspoken mind had broken, leaving the experience all in one sort, mystically sensual. Thousands of years ago, that which was mystically imminent in himself must have taken place in these Africans: the goodness, the holiness, the desire for creation and productive happiness must have lapsed, leaving the single impulse for knowledge in one sort, mindless progressive knowledge through the senses, knowledge arrested and ending in the senses, mystic knowledge in disintegration and dissolution, knowledge such as the beetles have, which live purely within the world of corruption and cold dissolution. That was why her face looked like a beetle's . . .'

Murry sees nothing here but Lawrence's personal 'case', the significance being self-diagnosis or self-exposure: 'Birkin shrinks back from the lapse from goodness in himself'. And it is true that Lawrence (as he is fully aware) knows the general human plight because he himself is part of contemporary civilized humanity. But to be able, in reading through *Women in Love*, to ignore the whole presentment of the general plight!—it shows what blindness can be induced by a predetermined and stubborn misdirection of interest. For, as I hope I have sufficiently demonstrated, all the resources of a marvellously vital and intelligent art are devoted, in that book, to transcending, not only the author's personal case, but that of any presented individual.

The presence of impersonal themes, in their significant relations, is plain enough (one would have thought) on the page from which Murry takes his diagnostic passage. The West African statuette (this we are actually told, and the local explicitness merely picks up what has been done in drama, imagery and poetic organization) represents something that we are to see as a default, a failure, antithetical—and so significantly related—to the human disaster enacted by Gerald Crich. A strong normative preoccupation, entailing positives that are concretely present in many ways (we have them above in the phrases, 'the goodness, the holiness, the desire for creation and productive happiness') informs the life of *Women in Love*—the life that manifests itself in the definition and 'placing' of these opposite human disasters. If Lawrence's art exposes so cogently the malady of a civilization in which will and 'idea', controlling from above, have usurped the direction, and the smooth-running of an almost inconceivably intricate interlocking of mechanisms has become the supreme end, that is not by way of recommending a flight from intelligence and responsibility.

In fact, we are made to see the cult of the primitive as a symptom of the malady. This significance gets its completed defini-

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tion in that final act which has for setting the high, remote world of inhuman cold and snow. As Gerald and Gudrun 'stepped out on the naked platform', at the end of the tiny valley railway,

> 'with only snow around and above. Gudrun shrank as if it chilled her heart.
>
> "My God, Jerry", she said, turning to Gerald with sudden intimacy, "you've done it now" '.

We have had a plain enough hint of what is coming, and of the relation between the significance of the West African carving, and that of the snow, in the self-same meditation of Birkin's from which Murry snips out the piece that fits the diagnosis. Birkin reflects:

> 'There is a long way we can travel, after the death-break: after that point when the soul in intense suffering breaks, breaks away from its organic hold like a leaf that falls. We fall from the connection with life and hope, we lapse from pure integral being, from creation and liberty, and we fall into the long, long African process of purely sensual understanding, knowledge in the mystery of dissolution. . . .
>
> There remained this way, this awful African process to be fulfilled. It would be done differently by the white races. The white races, having the arctic north behind them, the vast abstraction of ice and snow, would fulfil a mystery of ice-destructive knowledge, snow-abstract annihilation. . . .
>
> Was this then all that remained. . . . Is our day of creative life finished? . . .
>
> Birkin thought of Gerald. He was one of those strange, white wonderful demons from the north fulfilled in the destructive frost mystery. And was he fated to pass away in this knowledge, this one process of frost-knowledge, death by perfect cold? Was he a messenger, an omen of the universal dissolution into whitness and snow? '

I confess that in this kind of explicitness and this kind of prose I see an element in *Women in Love* that is open to criticism. But the significances pointed to here are conveyed concretely in the work as a whole with the living cogency of great art. In the closing act in the world of snow we have the process completed.

To go through even this relatively short part of the whole in a detailed analysis is out of the question: it is too densely and subtly organized. But consider the part played by Loerke, the German sculptor whom the English party find at the hostel among the guests already there. He is a small, strange underworld creature: Gudrun, whom he attracts, 'could see in his brown, gnome's eyes the blank look of inorganic misery', though he is intelligent, and, in his uneasy way, contemptuously self-sufficient. He tells her about a great granite frieze he has made for a factory in Cologne:

> 'It was a representation of a fair, with peasants and artizans in an orgy of enjoyment, drunk and absurd in their modern dress,

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whirling ridiculously in roundabouts, gaping at shows, kissing and staggering and rolling in knots, swinging in swing-boats, and firing down shooting galleries, a frenzy of chaotic motion'.

The discussion that follows between him and Gudrun has its clear part in the thematic exposition and development:

> ' "Sculpture and architecture must go together. The day for irrelevant statues, as for wall-pictures, is over. . . . And since churches are all museum stuff, since industry is our business now, then let us make our places of industry our art—our factory-area our Parthenon, *ecco*!"
>
> "And do you think then", said Gundrun, "that art should serve industry?"
>
> "Art should *interpret* industry, as art once interpreted religion", he said.
>
> "But does your fair interpret industry?" she asked him.
>
> "Certainly. What is man doing when he is at a fair like that? He is fulfilling the counterpart of labour—the machine works him, instead of he the machine. He enjoys this mechanical motion in his own body!"
>
> "But is there nothing but work—mechanical work?" said Gudrun.
>
> "Nothing but work!" he repeated, leaning forward, his eyes two darknesses, with needle-points of light. No, it is nothing but this, serving a machine, or enjoying the motion of a machine—motion, that is all. You have never worked for hunger, or you would know what god governs us" '.

The relation of this attitude to Gerald's doesn't need labouring: both artist and industrialist accept, from their different points of view, the triumph of mechanism, and the implicit reduction of human life to mere instrumentality. And the conception of art expressed by Loerke doesn't stand by itself, unrelated; it has its part in the comprehensive examination of the nature and function of art that the reader, once adverted, will find to have been performed in the course of *Women in Love*. Loerke himself goes on to provoke the explicit statement of the conception that we recognize to be Lawrence's own—one illuminated and supremely vindicated by the book. The sculptor produces the photogravure of a statuette, a 'more popular' work of his. It represents a girl, slight and naked, sitting 'exposed on the flank' of a horse—'a massive, magnificent stallion, rigid with pent-up power'. Gudrun, we are told, 'went pale, and a darkness came over her eyes, like shame, she looked up with a certain supplication, almost slave-like'.

Nevertheless, and significantly, she stands by Loerke in the sharp battle that follows with Ursula. Ursula asks why the horse should have been made 'so stock and stupid and brutal', and Loerke retorts, insultingly *de haut en bas*, that the horse is a 'piece of form':

> "Wissen sie, gnädige Frau, that is a Kunstwerk, a work of art. It is a work of art, a picture of nothing, of absolutely nothing:

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it has no relation with the everyday world of this and other, there is no connection between them, absolutely none, they are two different and distinct planes of existence, and to translate one into the other is worse than foolish, it is a darkening of all counsel, a making confusion everywhere. Do you see, you *must not* confuse the relative world of action with the absolute work of art. That you *must not do*." '

But Ursula refuses to be quenched:

' "It isn't a word of it true, of all this harangue you have made me", she replied flatly. "The horse is a picture of your own stock stupid brutality, and the girl was a girl you loved and tortured and then ignored". . . .

"As for your world of art and your world of reality, . . . you have to separate the two because you can't bear to know what you are. You can't bear to realize what a stock, stiff, hide-bound brutality you *are* really, so you say 'it's the world of art'. The world of art is only the truth about the real world, that's all—but you are too far gone to see it" '.

Ursula's indignant naïveté is far from discrediting what she says; she affirms, in fact, the conception of art that is exemplified by the work of genius that contains her. We see her as opposing plain and profound truth to shallow sophistication and sophistry. The pregnant and subtle relevance of the whole episode to the main themes of the book becomes apparent as we consider the pages that follow. Loerke is not a major character, and he appears only in this closing act; but there is nothing gratuitous or loose about his appearance. Lawrence's art seems fed by an inexhaustible creative flow, but he organizes with a corresponding closeness. Ursula's personal charge against Loerke is borne out by what he himself tells about his relations with his model, and what he avows about his taste in the other sex (the sinister effect, as of a deep-seated perversion, inimical to life, conveyed by his avowal—'at sixteen, seventeen, eighteen—after that, they are no good to me'—cannot be missed by the reader and hardly needs analysis.)

Nevertheless, Gudrun finds herself oddly drawn to him, and the attraction is mutual. As in the intensifying seclusion of the snow-world the strain between her and Gerald—the oppression, for her, of his need, and the torturing humiliation of it for him—becomes intolerable, she takes more and more to spending her time in conversation with Loerke. What attracts in him is the antithesis of Gerald. It is, in appearance, a qualified antithesis, for Loerke doesn't bother about consistency. But the antithesis is there, and Birkin explains it to Gerald:

' "He's a gnawing little negation, gnawing at the roots of life."

"But why does anybody care about him?" cried Gerald.

"Because they hate the ideals also in their souls. They want to explore the sewers, and he is the wizard rat that swims ahead." '

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Loerke and Gudrun talk together about art. 'They were almost of the same ideas', and 'he liked the West African figures, the Aztec art, Mexican and Central American'. At the same time—and it is no difficult paradox at this point in *Women in Love*—'they took a sentimental, childish delight in the achieved perfections of the past'. And then comes this remarkable passage (written, we remind ourselves, more than thirty years ago):

> 'They played with the past, a sort of little game of chess, or marionettes, all to please themselves. They had all the great men for their marionettes, and they two were the God of the show, working it all. As for the future, that they never mentioned except one laughed out some mocking dream of the destruction of the world by a ridiculous catastrophe of man's invention: a man invented such a perfect explosive that it blew the earth in two, and the two halves set off in difficult directions through space, to the dismay of the inhabitants; or else the people of the world divided into two halves, and each decided that it was perfect and right, and the other half was wrong and must be destroyed; so another end of the world. Or else, Loerke's dream of fear, the world went cold, and snow fell everywhere, and only white creatures, polar-bears, white foxes, and men like awful white snow-birds, persisted in ice-cruelty.
>
> Apart from these stories, they never talked of the future'.

The relation between the taste for the West African, the taste for the 'achieved perfections of the past', and the characteristics of contemporary civilization represented by Gerald hardly needs expounding. Loerke and Gudrun are artists, but of art as serving 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being'—a fulness impossible without 'mental consciousness' and a creativity in which intelligence has its indispensable part—they know nothing. Repelled by the world of usurping 'idea' and will with its triumphs of automatism and mechanical order, they can only react to the other extreme, or cultivate the finished perfections of the past in a subtler denial of creative life in the present. In these two 'the goodness, the holiness, the desire for creation and productive happiness' have essentially lapsed.

The contact with Loerke gives the Gudrun-Gerald relation its complete definition. For Gudrun, 'art', we have been made to recognize in full explicitness, is a very different thing from 'art' for the creator of *Women in Love*. We see, in this last act, that the intolerableness for her of Gerald's need has for its other aspect the need in her, now finally disappointed, that had made him so strongly attractive till now. She lies awake, thinking of Gerald's 'force of will and his power of comprehending the actual world':

> 'Her heart beat fast, she flew away on wings of elation, imagining a future. He would be a Napoleon of peace, or a Bismarck—and she the woman behind him. She had read Bismarck's letters, and had been deeply moved by them. And

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Gerald would be freer, more dauntless than Bismarck.

And even as she lay in fictitious transport, bathed in the strange false sunshine of hope in life, something seemed to snap in her, and a terrible cynicism began to gain upon her, blowing like a wind'.

Her answer to the question, 'What for?'—and the irony is that she comes to the full recognition now, when the emptiness of the answer surrounds her inescapably in the form of the snow-world—was to have been Gerald's, made for her a satisfying answer by being vicariously acted. What speaks in the question is the thwarted need for 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being.':

'And at the same instant came the ironical question: "What for?" She thought of the colliers' wives, with their linoleum and their lace-curtains and their little girls in high-laced boots. She thought of the wives and daughters of the pit-managers, their tennis-parties, and their terrible struggles to be superior each to the other, in the social scale. There was Shortlands with its meaningless distinction, the meaningless crowd of the Criches. There was London, the House of Commons, the extant social world. My God!

Young as she was, Gudrun had touched the whole pulse of social England!'

This last sentence is no mere statement. It evokes for us in an epitomising presence what the whole book has so potently done. We are told only that we may sharply recall; for after reading *Women in Love* we do feel that we have 'touched the whole pulse of social England'. It is one of the astonishing manifestations of Lawrence's genius that he can, with easy mastery, achieve this—he, the miner's son and the ex-elementary-schoolteacher. By the time we come to Gudrun's definitive collapse we seem to have experienced, in unanswerable actuality, the representative varieties of English life. What other English novelist commands such a range?—and Lawrence *commands* it, for his penetration is incomparably deep, and his perception of significance keeps everything duly functional to the development of his themes.

The realization that will and idea and dominant masculinity in Gerald can supply no answer to the question that gnaws from within leaves Gudrun unable to evade the failure, in herself, of 'spontaneous-creative life'. The failure manifests itself to her in an experience that, suffered from time to time by different actors, recurs in *Women in Love*: an obsessed and tormenting awareness of time as measured by the clock, an endless succession of minutes and hours and days.

'The thought of the mechanical succession of day following day, day following day, *ad infinitum*, was one of the things that made her heart palpitate with a real approach of madness. The terrible bondage of this tick-tack of time, this twitching of the hands of the clock, this eternal repetition of hours and days—

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oh God, it was too awful to contemplate. And there was no escape from it, no escape.

She almost wished Gerald were with her to save her from the terror of her own thoughts. Oh, how she suffered, lying there alone, confronted by the terrible clock, with its eternal tick-tack. All life, all life resolved itself into this: tick-tack, tick-tack, tick-tack; then the striking of the hour; then the tick-tack, tick-tack, and the twitching of the clock-fingers.

Gerald could not save her from it'.

Gerald, of course, could not save himself. But in him, at this stage, failure of that life which cannot be commanded, though it can be thwarted, by will and 'mental consciousness' manifests itself in his rapid assimilation into the snow-world. After the departure of Birkin and Ursula, followed as it is by the overt breach with Gudrun, he spends his days on skis in a frenzied coursing of the slopes of endless snow. Finally, after the violent scene with Gudrun and Loerke, in which he behaves like an angry automaton, he goes off on his skis, mere unseeing 'go' now, and ends in the hollow near the top of the pass, where his life fades out into the cold. His body is brought back to the hostel frozen.

The drama as it centres in Gerald, involving as it does the diagnostic presentment of the large movement of civilization, has the effect—one difficult, in the nature of the case, to test in a count of pages—of bulking a good deal more largely in the whole than the Birkin-Ursula theme. No separation, of course, can really be made: the total drama is a closely organized whole, and the significance depends upon (among other things) the interplay between the two halves of the quartet.

In Birkin's married relations with Ursula the book invites us to localize the positive, the conceivable and due—if only with difficulty attainable—solution of the problem; the norm, in relation to which Gerald's disaster gets its full meaning. The stretch of the chapter 'Moony' from which Murry quotes, for misuse, the passage in which Birkin recalls the African carving—a passage followed immediately, as we have seen, by the paragraphs in which Birkin thinks of Gerald as the omen of the 'universal dissolution into whiteness and snow', 'snow-abstract annihilation'—brings us next to this:

'Suddenly his strained attention gave way, he could not attend to these mysteries any more. There was another way, the way of freedom. There was the paradisal entry into pure, single being, the individual soul taking precedence over love and desire for union, stronger than any pangs of emotion, a lovely state of free proud singleness, which accepted the obligation of the permanent connection with others, and, with the other, submits to the yoke and leash of love, but never forfeits its own proud individual singleless, even while it loves and yields'.

Murry quotes this too, and interprets it in terms of his damning account of Lawrence the man, and of Lawrence's intimate relations

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with Frieda. Birkin, for him, is nothing but the self-vindicating, self-deceiving presence of Lawrence himself in the book. That Birkin is substantially Lawrence there can be little temptation to deny; for one of the most striking proofs of creative power, with its transcendent impersonalizing intelligence, in *Women in Love*, is the way in which the author's direct presence is given a dramatic status among the other characters.

Some of the means by which Birkin is 'placed', and we are reminded that, as special representative of Lawrence's conscious and formulated attitudes, he is exposed to the implicit criticism of the whole creative context ('Never trust the artist, trust the tale'), offer themselves plainly for examination. We may take for example the chapter, 'Gudrun and the Pompadour', and the letter, a Laurentian self-parody, that, first intoned parsonically by Halliday for public derision, Gudrun snatches from his hand and walks off with. This episode reinforces the criticism, implicitly admitted by Birkin, that Ursula brings against him from time to time. In the chapter called 'An Island', for instance, we are told that she 'hated the Salvator Mundi touch. It was something diffuse and generalized about him, which she could not stand'. Again:

> 'There was a certain Sunday-school stiffness about him, priggish and detestable'.

But we may see a more significant clue to the nature of Lawrence's success with Birkin in the following (it comes in the chapter called 'Mino') which is a very fine example of Lawrence's command of the methods he invented to meet the originality of his purpose—consider what is done in the episode of the cats:

> '"Ha!" she cried bitterly. "It is the old dead morality".
>
> "No", he said, "it is the law of creation. One is committed. One must commit oneself to a conjunction with the other—for ever. But it is not selfless—it is a maintaining of the self in mystic balance and integrity—like a star balanced with another star".
>
> "I don't trust you when you drag in the stars", she said. "If you were quite true it wouldn't be necessary to be so far-fetched".
>
> "Don't trust me then", he said, angry. "It is enough that I trust myself".
>
> "And that is where you make another mistake", she replied. "You *don't* trust yourself. You don't fully believe yourself what you are saying. You don't really want this conjunction, otherwise you wouldn't talk so much about it, you'd get it".

Taking this hint we realize that in Birkin, who is far from being co-extensive with the 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being' out of which *Women in Love* comes, Lawrence, the whole creative artist, enacts a tentative or kind of experimental process—a testing and exploring of the conscious and formulated conclusions that Birkin thinks he has settled in securely enough to act upon. *Has* he? What in the concrete do they really amount to? Do they involve any

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self-deception or illusion or unreality? These questions the thoroughly dramatic Birkin enacts. Self-dramatized in Birkin the Lawrence who formulates conclusions ('doctrines') and ponders them suffers exposure to the searching tests and the impersonal criteria that the artist's creative genius, which represents an impersonal profundity and wholeness of being, implicitly and impartially applies to them. The creative work itself is not to be taken as offering any such conclusions, except in so far as the reader feels that the 'tale' does in fact endorse, concretely define, and convey them. The tentative note on which *Women in Love* ends should leave us recognizing Lawrence's full awareness of this truth, and recognizing the sensitive integrity with which he serves it.

Actually, it seems to me, the position for which Birkin contends in his wooing of Ursula does emerge from the 'tale' vindicated, in the sense that the norm he proposes for the relations of man and woman in marriage has been made, by the varied resources of Lawrence's art, sufficiently clear, and, in its intelligibility, sufficiently cogent, to compel us to a serious pondering. The long drama of Birkin's relations with Ursula, which lends itself so little to dramatic presentation in the ordinary sense of the adjective, illustrates, in the doing, the astonishing originality of the novelist's genius. The drama takes its decisive start in the early chapter (III) called 'Classroom'. This chapter opens with that tenderly beautiful evocation of the late-afternoon school-room which tells us that Lawrence's memories of his school-teaching days were far from wholly distasteful (he was too creative a spirit for that); while Ursula's self-forgetful intentness on the botany lesson gives us Lawrence's own capacity for absorption, and conveys too the delighted and reverent wonder associated for him—so characteristically—with the study of botany. Upon the scene comes the threat of electric violence as first Birkin and then Hermione arrive, and the embarrassed triangle fills the school-room with odd tensions.

In this scene Hermione's function of parodying Lawrence is peculiarly manifest:

> ' "Do you really think, Rupert", she asked, as if Ursula were not present, "do you really think it is worth while? Do you really think the children are better for being roused to consciousness?"
>
> A dark flush went over his face, a silent fury. He was hollow-cheeked and pale, almost unearthly. And the woman, with her serious, conscious-harrowing question tortured him on the quick.
>
> "They are not roused to consciousness", he said. "Consciousness comes to them, willy-nilly".
>
> "But do you think they are better for having it quickened, stimulated? Isn't it better that they should remain unconscious of the hazel, isn't it better that they should see as a whole, without all this pulling to pieces, all this knowledge?"
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Doesn't it destroy all our spontaneity, all our instincts? Are not the young people growing up to-day really dead before they have a chance to live?"

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"Not because they have too much mind, but too little", he said brutally.

"Are you *sure*?" she cried. "It seems to me the reverse. They are over-conscious, burdened to death with consciousness".

"Imprisoned within a limited, false set of concepts", he cried.

. . . . . .

"You are merely making words", he said; knowledge means everything to you. Even your animalism, you want it in your head".'

What Hermione utters—and she persists in her line through the painful duel with Birkin that follows—is what the world has been content to take for the pure Laurentian doctrine. Birkin repudiates it, with the violence of exasperation and disgust, and there is no need to stress the significance of his having been given the opportunity. But the dramatic projection remains wholly undisturbed, and what we have is more than a simple dissociation. Hermione, as Birkin himself (we recognize) could tell us, doesn't merely represent someone else's perversion of his 'doctrine'; the perversion is one he has had to take note of in his own inner experience. As he says of the school-children, 'Consciousness comes to them, willy-nilly'; intelligence has its indispensable part. Birkin's 'prophetic' conclusions, or general formulations, in their very nature as such, testify to the vital function of 'mental consciousness' in the attainment of 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being'. But mental consciousness brings with it the inevitable danger, and only a constant delicate concern for wholeness can ensure against the perversion that means a usurping domination from above. What Birkin denounces so brutally in Hermione is what he knows as a dangerous potentiality in himself.

Hermione's case, we can see, has a close affinity with Gerald's, with whom, significantly, she maintains a kind of sympathetic antagonism; they 'were always strangely but politely and evenly inimical'. Their relations are given us (to take one of the many ways) in the chapter called 'Sketchbook', when, together in the one boat, they both, in a pointless (and therefore expressive) encounter of wills, stretch out an insistent hand for Gudrun's sketch-book, with the result that it falls in the mere. Their relations have already been overtly stated in the chapter callled 'Carpentry', where, the episode of the Arab mare being under discussion, Hermione supports Gerald: "If only we could learn to use our will we could do anything", she says, adducing her own self-cures (nail-biting and so on). She exemplifies, in fact, dominating will in the intellectual, as Gerald represents it in the 'executive type'; and we see how, in the whole presentment of the human case offered by the drama, she relates Gerald and Birkin.

After the scene in the class-room, though Birkin has yet to escape from an embarrassing residual relation with Hermione, all his hopes, it soon becomes plain, are fixed on Ursula. With her his problem, a tough one (for she offers a natural and femininely tena-

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cious resistance), is to win her to an acquiescent understanding of the norm he propounds as what, in the relation of man to woman, is to be realized between them. The exposition involves some violent offence against her ideas of love:

> ' "We want to delude ourselves that love is the root. It isn't. It is only the branches. The root is beyond love, a naked kind of isolation, an isolated me, that does not meet and mingle, and never can".'

In these places Birkin stands convicted of being what, on Ursula's retaliatory challenge, he can't but deprecate: the preacher —the preacher whom he too, in the mirror she holds up, readily sees as a prig. In fact, an experimental process of exploring, testing and defining does seem really to be enacted, dramatically, in the 'tale'; so little are we affected as by any doctrine formulated in advance, and coming directly from Lawrence. For all Birkin's misgivings ('Was it only an idea, or was it the interpretation of a profound yearning?'), and his unsettling ability to hear his own accents as they affect Ursula, he is nevertheless confirmed in the position he stands for. He puts it to himself as he lies in bed, recovering from illness (chap. XLV, 'Man to Man'):

> 'Man must be added on to a woman before he had any real place or wholeness.
>
> And why? Why should we consider ourselves, men and women, as broken fragments of one whole? It is not true. Rather we are the singling away into purity and clear being of things that were mixed. Rather the sex is that which remains in us of the mixed, the unresolved. And passion is the further separating of this mixture, that which is manly being taken into the being of the man, that which is womanly passing to the woman, till the two are whole and clear as angels, the admixture of sex in the highest sense surpassed, leaving two single beings constellated together like two stars.
>
> . . . There is now to come the new day, when we are beings each of us, fulfilled in difference. The man is pure man, the woman pure woman, and they are perfectly polarized. But there is no longer any of the horrible merging mingling self-abnegation of love. There is only the pure duality of polarization, each one free from any contamination of the other. In each, the individual is primal, sex is subordinate, but perfectly polarized. Each has a single separate being, with its own laws. The man has his pure freedom, the woman hers. Each recognizes the perfection of the polarized sex-circuit. Each admits the different nature in the other'.

This may strike the reader as Laurentian prophetic 'preaching'. But the need of some norm for the relations between men and women other than what Gerald and Gudrun enact is cogently presented by the 'tale'. Birkin posits a relation that shall be, in its vitality, stable and permanent because the terms between which it subsists are real; the need or demand of neither of the two

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individuals who find fulfilment in the relation is of such a kind as to deny the individual being of the one or of the other.

In Ursula Birkin finds something to be fought before the hope of a permanent relation can be assured—something he calls the 'Magna Mater':

> 'Did he not know it in Hermione. Hermione, the humble, the subservient, what was she all the while but the Mater Dolorosa, in her subservience, claiming with horrible, insiduous arrogance and female tyranny her own again, claiming back the man she had borne in suffering. By her very suffering and humility she bound her son with chains, she held him her everlasting prisoner.
>
> And Ursula, Ursula was the same—or the inverse. She too was the awful, arrogant queen of life, as if she were a queen bee on whom all the rest depended . . . She was unconscious of it herself. She was only too ready to knock her head on the ground before a man. But that was only when she was so certain of her man that she could worship him as a woman worships her own infant, with a worship of perfect possession'.

The possessiveness he divines in Ursula is what (though that, we may feel, is not all) he sees in the reflected moon which, in the uncanny scene (chap. XIX) where she watches from among the dark trees, he shatters with stone after stone, starting again and again with a kind of possessed frenzy each time it re-forms. It does, of course, re-form finally; Birkin, appealed to by Ursula, gives up his stoning, sits down by her, and responds at last to her plea that he shall say he 'loves' her. This might seem to portend for Birkin ineluctable defeat in the end. Actually the observation called for at this point is that significance in Lawrence's art is never a matter of a mere intended 'meaning' symbolized; it works from profounder levels and in more complex ways. It is enough here to say that, in beginning to reflect back over the whole dramatic poem, the perceptive reader will not assume any simple identity between Birkin's own formulated view of his relations with Ursula and what is conveyed by the 'tale' (even though Ursula endorses Birkin's normative conclusions in her parting talk with Gudrun). On the other hand, we sufficiently see their union as successful to take, and take as significant, the contrast it presents to the disaster of the other pair. The question-mark on which, with characteristic Laurentian integrity, the book ends regards the implications of Birkin's failure with Gerald. For the relation with Gerald was to have been an essential condition of a successful 'polarity'. Contemplating the frozen corpse of his friend, Birkin is left with nothing to disguise from him the question that faces him and Ursula: the question of the kind of success possible in marriage, and in life, for a pair that have cut themselves finally adrift. The society in which, if they had a place, their place would be, represents the civilization that has been diagnosed in Gerald.

F. R. LEAVIS.

(To be concluded in the next issue.)

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CORRESPONDENCE:

THE RELATION BETWEEN WILLIAM AND HENRY JAMES

Dear Sirs,

I do not raise the following point for the purpose of continuing the discussion on *The Turn of the Screw*. Both Mr. Leavis and myself have pretty fully defined our respective positions, and there is little to be gained by going on indefinitely offering interpretations and counter-interpretations of the details of the story. However, Mr. Leavis makes a remark in his reply to my rejoinder which provides an opportunity to introduce a new topic to which I think a good deal of interest attaches. It is solely in the interests of this further subject that I take the occasion now offered.

By 'excursion into chaos' Mr. Leavis says James only means 'the extreme freedom of improvization that constitutes the trap or difficulty of the "fairytale" for a serious artist'. This 'freedom of improvization' is, I agree, partly a freedom of technical improvization. But I do not think James belonged with those Americans for whom technique 'pure and simple' was capable of becoming an end in itself. The emphasis on technique in James is usually accompanied by, and is, indeed, the very means by which he usually expresses, his moral interests. I think it goes without saying that Mr. Leavis would agree with such a statement, although he would make an exception of *The Turn of the Screw*: 'the story has no ponderable significance; it is a mere thriller'. In my discussion of *The Turn of the Screw* I was not primarily interested in James's freedom to improvise technically, although I think I did not neglect that aspect of the story. I was chiefly interested in James's freedom to improvise on the moral plane, which I did not see as ultimately separable from his technical freedom. This kind of 'extreme freedom of improvization' seemed to me possible because James *apparently* conceived no inherent or overriding law as governing the terms of human existence. This kind of freedom of moral improvization seems to me to constitute 'an excursion into chaos' in the sense in which I interpreted the phrase, and since such a freedom constitutes an intellectual and philosophical position, the story acquired in my own eyes a significance that was ponderable in that degree in which it revealed something about James's attitudes which might ultimately prove relevant to understanding his fictions as art. This story, taken with others which I discussed, seemed to suggest that for James the universe was pragmatically plastic, both for good and for evil. In that word 'pragmatic' I get to the real purpose of my present remarks.

Up to now there has seemed little opportunity of discussing the relationship between William and Henry James. To say that either has any direct influence on the work or thought of the other would

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be a stronger statement than one might be able to substantiate. But each brother, in his own peculiar set of terms, represents a development frequently parallel with the other. What the origin of this similarity in their development is I am not concerned with here. But I think the tension between appearance and reality which I have discussed in James's novels becomes immediately intelligible from a different point of view when it is discussed in terms of his brother's pragmatism. Pragmatism really existed in America long before William James formulated it in an intellectual position. The whole historical situation conspired to make America into a nation of pragmatists, and all William James had to do was to take the temperature of the air around him and give it a name and definition. From the eighteenth century or earlier Americans had remodelled ancient European reality to meet their own needs, and their sense of having done so successfully left them with a great feeling of optimism about their ability to continue remodelling in the future. The norm by which they had lived was one of comfortable, and sometimes luxurious, expediency, and expediency had come, in their eyes, to be the good and true. Consequently, when William James formulated his pragmatic conception of truth, the definition was likely to be more satisfying than startling to the bulk of Americans:

> 'Grant an idea or belief to be true, what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth's cash value in experiential terms? The moment pragmatism asks this question, it sees the answer. *True ideas are those we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot.* That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known as'.

Or even more pointedly:

> 'The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is made true by events: its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-*fication*. Its validity is the process of its valid-*ation*.

Henry James was wholly in sympathy with this pragmatic philosophy of his brother. In a letter to William James written from Lamb House on October 17, 1907, Henry James said:

> 'Why the devil I didn't write you after reading your *Pragmatism*—how I kept from it—I can't now explain save by the very fact of the spell itself (of interest and enthralment) that the book cast upon me; I simply sank down, under it, into such depths of submission and assimilation that *any* reaction, very nearly, even that of acknowledgement, would have had almost

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the taint of dissent or escape. Then I was lost in the wonder of the extent to which all my life I have (like M. Jourdain) unconsciously pragmatized. You are immensely and universally *right,* and I have been absorbing a number more of your followings-up of the matter in the American (Journal of Psychology?) which your devouring devotee Manton Marble . . . plied, and always on invitation does ply, me with. I feel the reading of the book, at all events, to have been really the event of my summer'.

The Golden Bowl had appeared three years before James wrote this letter. The interpretation which I offered of *The Golden Bowl* demonstrates, I think, exactly what James meant when he said 'I was lost in the wonder of the extent to which all my life I have . . . unconsciously pragmatized'. In Maggie Verver I think we have the greatest pragmatist in literature. She shows how truth can be constructed out of lies, and the verity of that truth '*is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself. . . .' This pragmatic base of James's art could be traced, I think, in a large number of short stories, although I only dealt with two, *The Liar* and *The Path of Duty*. It is this pragmatic bent in James, this 'extreme freedom of improvization' in the world of human behaviour—this belief that there is no immutable reality behind appearances, but that appearances can always be twisted into new and convenient realities—which constitutes so much of Henry James's American flavour.

This 'extreme freedom of improvization' as it exists in *The Turn of the Screw* amounts, I think, to a peculiarly perverse rendering of the doctrine of 'truth' which is discoverable in *The Golden Bowl*. It is the Credo of Pragmatism read backwards. It is easy enough to read the following quotation from the Preface to *The Turn of the Screw* as a reference *only* to the artistic, the technical process by which the story was created. But underneath that reference to an artistic process there is a profounder reference to a habit of thinking, a way of intellectual and spiritual life without which I do not think this story would have been successful. 'There is for such a case', James wrote in the Preface, 'no eligible *absolute* of the wrong; it remains relative to fifty other elements, a matter of appreciation, speculation, imagination—these things, moreover, quite exactly in the light of the spectator's, the critic's, the reader's experience'. There is no doubt that James is referring to the ingenious artistic solution here—but I believe such a solution would have occurred as a possibility *only* to a writer (and would certainly have been used successfully only by him) who was capable of approving William James's Pragmatism in such terms as were quoted above. In *The Golden Bowl* Maggie Verver constructs her Truth out of lies, but I believe that in *The Turn of the Screw* the Governess constructs her Evil out of Truth—the truth that resides in what I have contended is the innocence of the two children.

I said in my rejoinder that *The Turn of the Screw* contained possibilities that the American could respond to more readily than

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other people. I could now phrase this more intelligibly, perhaps, by saying that *The Turn of the Screw* is ingeniously calculated to exploit, albeit in a perverse way, that native pragmatic bent which pre-eminently characterizes, above all others, the American sensibility. One value at least I hope will be conceded to my reading of *The Turn of the Screw*: Pragmatism is said to be the most amiable of philosophies, but I think my conception of the Governess may suggest that it is also capable of proving a very nasty spoonful of bitters indeed, a veritable 'excursion into chaos'.

MARIUS BEWLEY.

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

ASPECTS OF MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

I.

Mr. B. Rajan's *Focus Number Five: Modern American Poetry*[1] ends with the answers given by a number of American poets to a questionnaire which he had sent them. The questions deal with American poetry, how it is to be distinguished from English poetry, whether its 'vocabulary, metric, cadences, syntax, punctuation differs notably from that of English poetry?' and so on. Such questions do not get one very far, and it is even possible that they may discourage one from going farther and asking more important questions. And yet such questions are not pointless either, for they lead into considerations of the relationship of the poet with his particular tradition. To quote from a non-contemporary work, *Gertrude of Wyoming*:

> Delightful Wyoming! beneath thy skies
> The happy shepherd swains had nought to do
> But feed their flocks on green declivities
> Or skim perchance thy lake with light canoe.

One feels safe in assuming that an American poet did not write that, and the observation is not irrelevant. It is closely associated with an appreciation of the quality of the verse itself. But the question of what constitutes an American poet *can* be a red herring that leads us into considerations of the typical rather than of the essential and the unique. Nearly all the poets whose answers are recorded here are fully aware of this fact, but yet not very much of interest emerges from their collective answers.

[1]Dennis Dobson Ltd., 8/6.

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And yet there does seem to be a significant difference between the American and English situations in poetry at present—a difference that cannot be defined by such considerations as subject, vocabulary, syntax, and punctuation. This difference lies, I believe, in different conceptions of what the function of a poet in society is. I do not necessarily mean the consciously held idea, but the function that is involuntarily served when the poet is actually practising his art. About a year ago I asked a well known young American poet what he thought the relation between an American poet and America ought to be, and he replied: 'To try and understand the sources of America's energy, and effect some relation between them and one's art'. About six months later I asked a much better known British poet what his idea of the relationship between the English poet and England ought to be, and he replied: 'To get out of her as soon as possible, and stay out as long as possible'. The reply of the American may be taken as pretty representative. Whether the English poet's reply is an extreme instance or not, it is perhaps not for me to say. But it does point to a situation or state in English poetry that is undeniable—a state which Mr. Cyril Connolly described for an American audience as one of 'exhaustion'.

In order to understand the nature of the 'energy' in modern American poetry (I am speaking here only of its existence; whether it is well used or not is another question) which is the distinguishing mark that differentiates it from English poetry, one had better begin by examining the state of poetry in England to-day.

The tradition of poetry flows unevenly, and at times dwindles, not even to a tiny trickle, but to a series of little stagnant ponds in which all life appears on the point of expiring. The reason seems to be that at infrequently spaced intervals a generation of poets is born who mobilizes speech and energy in such quantities and under such new aspects that the poets who occur between two such periods depend largely on the idiom and modes of feeling developed by their predecessors to express their own ideas. This is not usually owing to the lack of original talent in the later poets, but to the fact that the sensibility of the age has not yet changed sufficiently to justify that modification which an original poet must impose on old forms. The time has not yet developed those new requirements and urgencies which would make any such modifications intelligible to any envisaged public, or even to the poet himself. For if poets create the speech of their time, they cannot create it out of improper materials. They have to await the moment at which creation becomes possible. So it happens that poets, however considerable their own talents, may sometimes be confined to areas of speech and feeling from which no egress appears possible, and they appear wholly derivative or uninteresting who in a more felicitous and formative time might well have shown with greater originality and lustre.

The undeniable desiccation of English poetry to-day, while it may partly spring from causes that appear remediable, is also part of a larger historical cycle. To-day it sometimes appears that

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English poetry has entered into one of those periods of extreme aridity and discouragement during which most signs of vitality are destined to be proved either hopeless or bogus. Trapped in their time, English poets have not been able to evolve new forms because the time has not yet provided a basis for new speech. The moment at which an original new poet may arrive may be within a month, or it may be two generations off. All we know is that he has not yet arrived.

The American scene in poetry is distinguished from the English scene chiefly in this sense of function which its poets have. If, in view of the quality of much of their work, the conviction seems a little naïve, I am trying to point here to an attitude, a psychological situation, rather than offer a critical examination of the individual writers. This conviction of function, of important work to do, arises first of all from the material circumstances of American life, its overwhelming activity on every side, its mere physical appearance of bustle and directed energy. Since the War there has been an intensification of the desire to explore and define American experience, not in itself only, but in its relations with the world. And the fact that the American poet, unlike the English poet, is not inclined to resent his present government, permits him to feel functionally associated with that experience. What the vast horde of American poets mean by American experience is, of course, something that cannot safely be generalized about for more than one poet at a time, but all the poets have this—and this only—in common; each is aware that his own experience is American, and the sense of it gives him confidence and a feeling that what he has to say is important. The result may often be extremely bad poetry, but it is something very different from exhaustion. For example, opening Mr. Rajan's anthology to its first selection, one comes on a poem by Mr. James Laughlin, the editor of New Directions, which I am tempted to quote entire because I cannot quite imagine the attitude expressed in it transposed over into the English scene under any circumstances whatever, and it illustrates in a disarmingly frank-faced manner the attitude I have been speaking of, even to its title, 'Go West Young Man':

> Yessir they're all named
> either Ken or Stan or Don
> every one of them and
>
> those aren't just nick-
> names either no they're
> really christened like
>
> that just Ken or Stan or
> Don and you shake hands
> with anybody you run into
>
> no matter who the hell
> it is and say 'glad to
> know you Ken glad to

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know you Don' and then
two minutes later (you
may not have said ten

words to the guy) you
shake hands again and
say 'glad to have met

you Stan glad to' and
they haven't heard much
about Marx and the class

struggle because they
haven't had to and by
god it makes a country

that is fit to live in
and by god I'm glad to
know you Don I'm glad!

Whatever one might say about a piece like that, it does rest amazingly secure in its sense of the goodness of its own experience. It shows no doubts. Like a great deal of American writing, it is pure and emphatic assertion. Whether it has logic or not, it has a good deal of will in its make-up, and one is really surprised at the strength of the conviction behind it. Now these elements that are so apparent here—security and faith in its own experience (whatever that experience may be), a reliance on will and assertion, and a feeling that it is pretty important, are the most reliable signs by which to identify an American poem to-day. They are not infallible, but they are better signs than syntax, vocabulary and rhythm. They rarely exist as openly and simply as in 'Go West Young Man'. Sometimes the disguise is very deep indeed, but under whatever tropical growth of cynicism or tortuous self-questionings the poet may hide, if one listens carefully enough the voice of the American is heard at last expressing his satisfaction in his own being. To take a very straightforward example of this disguised security which I happen to have lying on my table at the moment, Mr. Delmore Schwartz ends a recent poem in which he carefully delineates the successive disillusionments of his life with these three verses:

Illusion and madness mock the years
  (A Godforsaken farce at best),
And yet through all these mounting fears
  How glad I am that I exist!

How strange the truth appears at last!
  I feel as old as outworn shoes,
I know what I have lost or missed,
  Or certainly will some day lose,

And yet this knowledge, like the Jews,
Can make me glad that I exist!
  with a hey ho, the foolish past,
    and a ho ho and a ha ha at last.

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Any English reader would probably have some difficulty in distinguishing this tone from the bravado of Henley, but nevertheless (and I am not thinking merely of the Elizabethan decor) it is something quite different. The attitude behind it is a reflection of an important part of American character—an ability to see-saw from cynicism into optimism and enthusiasm, and a moment later, rigorous conviction. Whatever disabilities may attend it, its chief virtue in American history is quickness of recovery. Americans could hardly get on without it, and it is therefore not to be dismissed as a merely shallow or silly or insubstantial attitude. Mr. Schwartz's poem is trivial enough, but I say all this because it is not a bad poem in the way I am fairly certain most English readers will conclude. And this attitude which is behind it—an attitude foreign to most Englishmen but indispensable to most Americans—is an important part of that larger complex of qualities which I am trying to suggest is one of the chief distinctions between the quality of English and American poetry.

But perhaps I may make my point more clearly by glancing at an article by Mr. Schwartz, 'The Grapes of Crisis', which recently appeared in *Partisan Review* (January-February, 1951). Mr. Schwartz presents in this article some evidence to suggest that since the First World War, but gaining incredible momentum since the Second, a change has been occurring in the American character—a change which is registered in American art, particularly in literature and films. New books have sorrowful titles: *Lord Weary's Castle*, *The Dispossessed*, *The Victim*, etc. New films have unhappy endings. And the Daisy Millers of American literature have given place to the nymphomaniac of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. All this Mr. Schwartz sees as evidence of a crushing disillusionment —an abandonment of traditional American optimism. But however persuasive the evidence may seem, Mr. Schwartz's own conclusions indicate that the change has so far been confined to the surface. Pointing to the cynicism which, in some respects, has overtaken the American literary scene, Mr. Schwartz accepts it as the basis for a real advance—the creation of 'the possibility of a genuinely tragic art. Nobility is quickened by tragedy and nurtured by necessity. Once the mind is capable of regarding the future with a sense of tragedy and a sense of comedy, instead of requiring the forced smiles (and the whistling in the dark) of dogmatic optimism, the awakened consciousness is prepared to respond to existence with courage and intelligence'.

Thus, the strategy of Mr. Schwartz's criticism follows the strategy of his poem, quoted above. At the last moment a joyful and unexpected reversal assures us that, in the face of grave dangers and direful recognitions, the American has come through. This is a deeper kind of optimism than the one which Mr. Schwartz has made the subject of his own paper, and it is one which I hope, and trust, will not be readily abandoned. I doubt if it can ever lead on to genuine tragic art, but it represents a valid resilience which may ward off tragedy outside the realm of art.

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II.

To speak of the American sense of function, and the American poet's feeling of importance, raises other questions. To what extent is this conviction valid, and to what extent bogus? Is it leading on to the production of genuine poetry, or is it merely substituting a metrical complacency for a discriminating creative sensibility? I am raising these questions *apropos* of the whole rampant activity of American poets from Mr. William Carlos Williams to Muriel Rukeyser. Any art or any organized activity in America that attracts much attention has to contend with a kind of excited exploitation that springs from a number of motives—some of them innocent. There is the genuine American desire for magnification, and the lust for living perpetually in the shadow of crisis. The geography and tradition of America provides a legitimate basis for these urges up to a point, but the American press and publishing houses, advertisers, political propagandists, and Hollywood, have all in their own respective ways found it profitable to encourage a tendency that opens avenues to American hearts or pockets. Now the conviction of function in American poets—that quality by which I have attempted to differentiate them from contemporary English poets—when it becomes too self-conscious, is inclined to desert its valid bases, and to magnify itself disproportionately. It is inclined to keep its eye on a program—say, some new version of Walt Whitman's vision of the Republic—to spend a good deal of time in congratulating itself, and to indulge in local tempests that promote the sensation of important activity, and of being in the vanguard of events. This kind of false excitement is deliberately encouraged by publishing houses and coteries which see a profitable issue in giving a March of Time staging to some volume or other. And so it gradually happens that a conviction, or a sense of function that began as a very valid attitude and as a sign of health in American poetry is changed into a manufactured and artificially sustained excitement, and American literature is subjected to a further infiltration of the spurious. One may take an example that is conveniently at hand in the form of an advertisement from a recent *Partisan Review*—a full page notice of Mr. Peter Viereck's last book of poems, *Strike through the Mask!* After Robert Lowell, Mr. Viereck has been one of the most discussed young American poets of the past several years. I have not seen the present volume, but his first volume, *Terror and Decorum*, which aroused a great deal of enthusiasm a year ago, seemed to offer little to justify the interest. However, I do not wish to consider Mr. Viereck's poetry here, but only the artificial stimulant that this present volume has been presented with. Across the top of the *PR* page in as great letters as the format allows we read, 'PETER VIERECK AND THE INDEX PROHIBITORIUM', and then comes this passage culled from a review:

> 'Mr. Viereck has been sinning, and grievously, these past twelve months. He has published an article, "My Kind of Poetry",

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in the *Saturday Review*, an act which constitutes trading with the enemy. Though emphatically opposed to Robert Hillyer's dim coterie, he has twice criticized the award of the 1949 Bollingen Prize to Ezra Pound's Pisan Cantos. And now, the crowning insult: he has brought out a second book of poems scarcely a year after publishing *Terror and Decorum*. Either he must repent or resign himself to a prominent and permanent position in the Index Prohibitorium of the New Criticism.'

The references will not all be familiar to English readers, but the intolerably smug tone of ersatz excitement cannot be mistaken. The effect is to blur the lines between reading publics in order to insure as large a public as possible. America is very conscious of the high-low-middle brow distinctions, and with the help of *Life* (who first took the hint from *Harper's Bazaar*) made a parlour game out of them about a year ago. The references to the New Criticism and its Index Prohibitorium on the one hand, and the unsavoury *Saturday Review of Literature* on the other, gives the insidious impression that poets and critics and their audiences are divided into opposed solidarities—an impression that is no doubt useful in promoting sales and an air of electioneering excitement, but which is in every other respect insidiously simplifying.

The proposition that I began with in these notes was simply that American poets have a sense of function and responsibility whereas English poets to-day have not. Without some such sense I do not see how poetry can be written at all. It is one of the indispensable qualifications of a poet. But I have also wished to point here to the grave dangers that attend a sense of function as it is sometimes exercised in a highly competitive and commercialized society—and American literary society is all of that. The American's passion for importance, magnitude, and for asserting his own identity, frequently ends in an expansiveness of mood which, however much it may encourage an evolving sense of the nation's literary destiny, does very little to fulfill it. I believe that this atmosphere is healthier than the complete inertness which now prevails in the English scene, but to call it health would be going very far indeed.

III.

As yet I have not attempted in this paper to look at any particular American poets very closely. The great number of them who possess a fair share of reputation is itself discouraging for anyone attempting a 'survey'. But one should not be misled by mere multitude into supposing that Americans are essentially more interested in literature than the English. Although some of the details of Tocqueville's analysis of American writing have changed since he wrote *Democracy in America* over a century ago, the greater number of American poets may still be explained as the product of peculiarly democratic processes of thought which he analysed:

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'Taken as a whole, literature in democratic ages can never present, as it does in the periods of aristocracy, an aspect of order, regularity, science, and art; its form will, on the contrary, ordinarily be slighted, sometimes despised. Style will frequently be fantastic, incorrect, overburdened, and loose—almost always vehement and bold. Authors will aim at rapidity of execution, more than at perfection of detail. Small productions will be more common than bulky books; there will be more wit than erudition, more imagination than profundity; and literary performances will bear marks of an untutored and rude vigour of thought—frequently of great variety and singular fecundity. The object of authors will be to astonish rather than to please, and to stir the passions more than to stir the taste. Here and there indeed, writers will doubtless occur who will choose a different track, and who will, if they are gifted with superior abilities, succeed in finding readers, in spite of their defects or their better qualities; but these exceptions will be rare, and even the authors who shall so depart from the received practice in the main subject of their works, will always relapse into it in some lesser details'.

There are ways in which this description no longer applies. For example, there is a growing emphasis on technique among American poets, and a taste for complicated metrical forms, which is replacing the older and hackneyed emphasis on experimentalism. But the passage is still true enough to indicate why being a poet comes more easily in America than in England. Many modern American poets have acquired great skill writing in intricate metrical patterns, but the complications of form which they pursue frequently seem to be achieved with facility rather than sustained with conviction or a poise that is not brittle. There is a disquieting tendency on the part of American critics to refer to these poets as 'great technicians'. I say it is disquieting because a highly ordered form in poetry ought to relate, it seems to me, to patterns of feeling and living somewhat less technological than the favoured phrase implies. I cannot imagine a seventeenth century critic reading 'Alexander's Feast' for the first time, and exclaiming: 'What a great technician Dryden is!' 'Technician', in such a context, means nothing more than 'verbal engineer', which may be why the critics of a highly technological civilization have come to favour it so much.

The 'technicians' among modern American poets may be divided into two groups. With the first group I shall not have space to deal here. These poets are concerned with expressing in a baroque verbal mode a highly sophisticated consciousness of life. They have come into special prominence since the war, no doubt regarding themselves as the young exponents of a New Decadence. But actually (though they would be horrified by the comparison) their verse goes back through Edna St. Vincent Millay to Emily Dickinson. Mr. Auden helps them conceal the fact as much as possible, but the emotional base of their 'wickedness' is little more than an amiable glamour-lapsing-into-cuteness. By far the best rep-

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resentative of the group (I dislike mentioning him in this connection for I consider him a very good poet) is Mr. Robert Horan, for whose single volume, *A Beginning*, one has a genuine regard. The criticisms I have made of this group of poets apply to him mainly as a warning, but it is asking rather much of his sensibility to suppose it can continue to support gracefully the growing weight of the artificial encrustations by which he gives form to his work. The images of his best poems show a lovely glaze, but it is the peculiar limitation of this manner, now so much favoured in America, that a Dead Glitter is always waiting her cue in the wings.

The second group of 'technicians' among contemporary American poets take religion as their theme, no doubt seeing in the order of their verse a correspondence to the order of their theology. The best of these poets is Mr. Robert Lowell. He published his second volume, *Lord Weary's Castle*,[2] in 1946, and official honours were immediately lavished on him. On a more personal level, Mr. Eliot committed himself in glowing terms on the merits of the work, and from Italy came word (via *Time*) that Mr. Santayana kept a copy of *Lord Weary's Castle* by his bedside. To choose from a number of enthusiastic acclamations from America's leading critics which are reprinted on the dust cover of the American edition, I quote Mr. Randall Jarrell: 'It is unusually difficult to say which are the best poems in *Lord Weary's Castle*: at least a dozen are realized past changing, triumphs that vary only in scope and intensity—a number of others are poems that almost any living poet would be pleased to have written. . . . When I reviewed Lowell's first book I finished by saying, "Some of the best poems of the next few years ought to be written by him". The appearance of *Lord Weary's Castle* makes me feel less like Adams or Leverrier than like a rain-maker who predicts rain, and gets a flood which drowns everyone in the country. A few of these poems, I believe, will be read as long as men remember English'.

There are indeed certain things that make Mr. Lowell's poetry impressive, and since my own criticism will be somewhat less favourable than Mr. Jarrell's, I should like to say at once what I believe those virtues are. In several of his poems there is an immediacy of relation between Lowell's sensibility and the old New England of shipping and the sea that comes off with unique distinction. 'The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket' (page 18), and particularly the first poem in the sequence which begins,

> A brackish reach of shoal off Madaket,—
> The sea was still breaking violently and night
> Had steamed into our North Atlantic Fleet,

is as original and fine a poem as America has produced. There is a kind of enduring newness in the evocations of the poetry that assert

[2]This has been republished in a larger selection of Mr. Lowell's work, *Poems: 1938-1949*, by Faber, 9/6. The page references to Mr. Lowell's poems refer to this edition.

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themselves more solidly with time. Speaking of a burial at sea,

> We weight the body, close
> Its eyes and heave it seaward whence it came,
> Where the heel-headed dogfish barks its nose
> On Ahab's void and forehead . . .

But it is difficult to quote from the poem without quoting it entirely.

An important element in Mr. Lowell's poetry is his feeling for Puritan New England. At the time most, if not all, of these poems were written, Lowell was a convert to the Catholic Church, and the Church forms a large part of their subject matter; but Lowell is not, as Mr. John Berryman has called him, 'the master of the Catholic subject without peer since Hopkins'. The quality of Lowell's sensibility depends almost entirely on its intractable Protestant puritanism, and it is never at its ease in Catholic images. The very structure of his sensibility is centred in considerations that were of overwhelming importance to the early New Englanders, but which are alien to Catholic feeling—ideas of innate depravity, the utter corruption of human nature and creation, regeneration, damnation of the non-elect, and a habit of tortuous introspection to test the validity of grace in the soul. All these doctrines have in Lowell's poetry professedly undergone conversion to Rome, but on the face of it they still look very much their old Protestant selves. The Blessed Virgin is as bleak in his poetry as if she were wearing a steeple crowned hat instead of a crown. One critic wrote of Lowell's poetry that it exposed 'the full force of the collision between a long heritage of New England Calvinism and the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church'. The critic was right, for a head-on collision between the Catholic tradition and an Apocaylptic Protestant sensibility is exactly what occurs in a verse like the following from 'Where the Rainbow Ends' (page 80):

> In Boston serpents whistle at the cold.
> The victim climbs the altar stair and sings:
> 'Hosannah to the lion, lamb, and beast
> Who fans the furnace face of IS with wings:
> I breathe the ether of my mariage feast.'
> At the high altar, gold
> And a fair cloth. I kneel and the wings beat
> My cheek. What can the dove of Jesus give
> You now but wisdom, exile? Stand and live,
> The dove has brought an olive branch to eat.

This poem, particularly the second verse, has a certain impressiveness, but it is a failure ultimately because it ends by being almost unintelligible. For example, the first line above may mean that in Boston sin is non-sensuous and chillblained, being the result mainly of the more frigid spiritual vices. But I am not at all sure. Such a meaning is not inevitable. As for the remainder of this verse, I would guess that the poet has just received Communion, but if so

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he commemorates the occasion very oddly indeed for a Catholic. None of the struggle of the opposing traditions, of Apocalyptic Protestantism and the Catholic Church, gets effectively through into the poetry. One is only aware of the grotesquely disturbing contrast, by which Mr. Lowell himself seems not to be bothered; and despite his intention, it is the Protestant element whose tone triumphs.

The Puritan saints, so far from resting on assurances of their election, gave themselves over to some of the most agonizing soul probing ever encouraged by any religion. They examined endlessly the nature of the grace they felt in their souls that they might be sure it was authentic and not a temptation from the Devil; they searched the Scriptures for confirmation, and analysed endlessly the movements of their hearts. All this developed a tone, an attitude—and despite the Catholic gesturing, it is an attitude one finds in Lowell's poetry. This attitude or tone sometimes becomes feverishly tortuous, and leads Lowell into attenuations so rarefied, and through logical transitions so slippery and concealed, that it is frequently impossible to follow him all the way. The poem 'Colloquy in Black Rock' (page 15) is an example of one of these dialogues between Lowell and his own heart as a preparation for its fuller possession by Christ. This seems to me not only a bad poem, but an extremely dull one from almost any point of view; nevertheless, it is worth considering as a way of approaching his most serious defect—the conviction that he is being, not only intelligible, but highly ordered and logical in the structure and disposition of his images when, in reality, his experience is claustrophobically private and subjective. Despite the rigorous appearance of an objective framework of logic, 'The Ferris Wheel' (page 26) is such a poem, and 'In the Cage' (page 64) is another.

A number of Lowell's poems can be interpreted in purely Protestant terms—for example, 'The Drunken Fisherman' (page 41) which is one of his best pieces. And it would no doubt be fairer to Lowell if one were to concentrate on these. But Lowell was specifically acclaimed as a Catholic poet, and to this fact he no doubt owed a good deal of his recognition. But whenever the subject is pointedly Catholic there is something disturbing in the tone. Turning to 'A Prayer for my Grandfather to Our Lady', Lowell's uncertainty or awkwardness is unmistakable under the boldness of feeling in a passage like this one addressed to the Blessed Virgin (page 32):

> O Mother, I implore
> Your scorched blue thunderbreasts of love to pour
> Buckets of blessings on my burning head
> Until I rise like Lazarus from the dead:
> *Lavabis nos et super nivem delabor.*

This is a network of conflicting connotations that operates at cross-purposes. 'Thunderbreasts', I presume, is meant to suggest the mythical Thunderbird of various Indian tribes, which was supposed to bring rain, and so the word may imply the life-giving qualities of Our Lady's love. But Our Lady and the Thunderbird

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(if it *is* intended, and I don't see what else could be meant here) belong to traditions too remote from each other to coalesce imaginatively at the low pressure to which they are submitted. Blue, of course, is Mary's colour. And perhaps 'blue thunderbreasts' is meant to emphasize the blue heavens from which rain and grace come. But the quality of Lowell's sensibility is such (and I am thinking of the poem in the full context of the volume) that the word seems likely to start a train of disease images. 'Buckets of blessings on my burning head', is breath-takingly infelicitous. Apart from the ugly sound of it, and the almost Gilbert and Sullivan visual image it presents, it suggests that Our Lady is dousing a halo, which can hardly be what is meant. I am not merely trying to be difficult, but I find this passage typical in the awkward qualities I have mentioned. It frequently happens that when Mr. Lowell is dealing with a religious subject something seems to go wrong with his verse —not inevitably so, for 'The Holy Innocents' (page 15) is a very fine poem. But a religious theme is usually a signal for intolerable strain.

This strain is not lessened when Mr. Lowell relates human action to religious significance. His sequence of four poems, 'Between the Porch and the Altar', is a melodramatic narration of a man who deserts his wife and two children for another woman, gets killed in a motor accident, and goes to Hell. At any rate, that is the action as far as I can follow it, but the character of the seducer seems strangely uneven. Something is left out or too much is put in—it's difficult to say which. In the first poem he is a son with a mother fixation. In the second he is a Concord farmer who, in the closing image, is identified with Adam in the act of committing Original Sin. In the fourth poem he turns up, rather sportily, in a night club shortly before his fatal mishap. Here is the opening of the fourth poem (page 55) and it illustrates the recurrence of that strain or awkwardness that I have just noted elsewhere:

> I sit at a gold table with my girl
> Whose eyelids burn with brandy. What a whirl
> Of Easter eggs is coloured by the lights,
> As the Norwegian dancer's crystalled tights
> Flash with her naked leg's high-booted skate,
> Like Northern Lights upon my watching plate.
> The twinkling steel above me is a star;
> I am a fallen Christmas tree. Our car
> Races through seven red lights—then the road
> Is unpatrolled and empty, and a load
> Of ply-wood with a tail-light makes us slow.
> I turn and whisper in her ear. You know
> I want to leave my mother and my wife,
> You wouldn't have me tied to them for life . . .

Apparently at that moment the accident occurs which, in view of the sentiments he is expressing just then, sends him straight to the Devil. What strikes me first in the passage is a characteristic and

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wooden ugliness that is related to the rhythm, and particularly to Mr. Lowell's flattening habit of placing a caesura just before the last foot in the line. It is a common practice with him, and can be better observed in a poem like 'After the Surprising Conversions' page 71):

> I preached one Sabbath on a text from Kings;
> He showed concernment for his soul. Some things
> In his experience were hopeful. He
> Would sit and watch the wind knocking a tree . . .

But to return to the earlier quotation—disagreeable as I think the rhythm is, it is matched by an unsatisfactoriness in the images themselves. Anticipating the descent into Hell in the last part of the poem, the second line strains too hard to get as much sordidness as possible out of a few glasses of brandy, and the sense of strain isn't lessened by the far-fetched image of the Easter eggs, which is obviously introduced for the purpose of recalling the Redemption, quite as if by accident. Again, I wonder why the nationality of the fancy skater is insisted on since the only effect that particular exactness serves is to start the American reader thinking of Sonja Henie. Nor can I understand in what relevant sense the speaker's plate may be said to be 'watching', unless, indeed, he is speaking, not of the plate on the gold table, but of his retina which he compares to a photographic plate. In the next line it is extremely difficult to know what the twinkling steel stands for. It may possibly mean that a sword is hanging above the poet's head, and that the consequent feeling of uncertainty which it engenders is a warning which might, if heeded, save him, and which for that reason he compares to the star of Bethlehem. But I do not know. One hopes it means something less far-fetched. The same kind of imprecision attends the next image into which the figure of the twinkling star naturally moves, 'I am a fallen Christmas tree'. This could mean a number of things, but it hardly seems to mean anything with very much certainty. The action which is recorded in the last lines quoted is handled laboriously and jerkily, and the closing bit of 'wickedness' is blurted out in an extremely youthful way.

Mr. Lowell is fond of bringing in the Devil, but he has never done it more unfortunately than in the finale of this poem:

> Here the Lord
> Is Lucifer in harness: hand on sword,
> He watches me for Mother, and will turn
> The bier and baby-carriage where I burn.

This passage is supposed to refer back to the mother-fixation described in the opening poem of the sequence, but unfortunately it catches an Audenesque cadence on the way which reduces it to something less than its stark and bristling intention. Or reading it another way, Lowell seems totally unaware that 'Mother' in this context inevitably recalls the Blessed Virgin, but that it presents

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the Mediatrix of Graces in a way that would be unforgivable to all Catholic apologists and artists.

Most critics have referred to Mr. Eliot as among Lowell's chief influences, but I think he is much nearer to Edwin Arlington Robinson. Both poets are disconcertingly fond of classic allusions, and they both present us with little tin-types of unusual American characters and episodes. And both have a disastrously 'literary' taste for the more romantic and ancient themes. We find Mr. Lowell writing exotic little set pieces (but on the surface quite 'modern' and difficult to read): 'Napoleon Crosses the Berezina', 'Charles the Fifth and the Peasant', or 'The Fens' (after Cobbett). As for Mr. Lowell's rhythm, a passage like the following from Robinson provides an antecedent for much of Lowell's verse much nearer than anything in Eliot:

> Now I call that as curious a dream
> As ever Meleager's mother had—
> Aeneas, Alcibiades, or Jacob.
> I'll not except the scientist who dreamed
> That he was Adam and that he was Eve
> At the same time; or yet that other man
> Who dreamed that he was Aeschylus, reborn
> To clutch, combine, compensate, and adjust
> The plunging and unfathomable chorus
> Wherein we catch, like a bacchanale through thunder,
> The chanting of the new Eumenides,
> Implacable, renascent, farcical,
> Triumphant, and American.

I should find myself hard-pressed if I were asked to put a particular passage from Lowell against that to demonstrate my point, but with the exception of several poems that seem to me highly distinguished, the volume as a whole is alive with echoes of that kind of writing. The interest and value in Mr. Lowell's poetry lies in the intensity of its Puritanism. No doubt it is necessary for the withered Puritan branch to be grafted on to the Roman stem in order for it to show life again, but once the Puritanism has the sap running in its veins, the Catholic element seems a marked intrusion in the poetry, unconvincing and woodenly handled. This makes for a bleak, and frequently ugly poetry. Some of Lowell's lines achieve something like classic ugliness, and the lines

> Her Irish maids could never spoon out mush
> Or orange juice enough,

I should be inclined to offer as among the most subtly repulsive on record. In the most literal sense, Lowell's world is astonishingly without colour. His images are all grey and black and white, and they gravitate towards such unpleasant items as snow, ice, snakes choking ducklings, dead cats, rats, coke-barrels, iron tubs, fish, mud, Satan, rubble, stones, smoke, coke-fumes, hammers, the diseases of old age, and every possible variation on the most

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depressing aspects of Winter. Except in a few poems I cannot see that Lowell transcends the dreary materials he builds them with. On the few occasions he achieves beauty in his poetry the sea is likely to be beating coldly and sombrely in the background.

And yet Lowell's poetry has an unusual integrity. Most of the time it is ugly, it is frequently awkward and strained, it is not at ease with its Catholic subject-matter. And yet it is authentic in its own way. Mr. Lowell's poetry proves, I think, that the sense of function which I predicated of the American poet in the beginning of this paper is not wholly a product of America's material activity. Among its deeper historical roots one may point to the New England puritanism of the seventeenth century, which regarded logic and rhetoric as a means of knowing and communicating Divine Truth. It is under the banners of logic and rhetoric, although these are subsumed in the name of poet, that Mr. Lowell undertakes his work. No poet could well conceive of a greater function than this religious onslaught on Truth, and it is, as I have tried to show, a function wholly validated by the tradition from which Mr. Lowell emerges. The final product, even if open to serious criticisms, immeasurably surpasses in seriousness and integrity the gilded effusions of some of England's contemporary 'religious' poets who have lately invested their metaphors in the Church.

IV.

The poets I have considered here are all comparatively young and striving, and in order to give a centre to these remarks on American poetry one should not hesitate to ask who is the most intrinsically important poet now writing in America. It seems to me that Wallace Stevens fills that role. His poetry is sometimes painfully difficult.

> The poem must resist the intelligence
> Almost successfully;

but the difficulty inheres in his profound recognition of the inexplicable quality of experience. It is impossible to undertake a consideration of Stevens' poetry here, but it seems necessary to make the bare assertion of his importance for the American scene if these notes are not to be misleading. Stevens is a thoroughly American poet, but I think he is the only one who perfectly transcends the limitations which characterize his native tradition. Even more: I believe he is the first American poet important enough to be able to counteract, after all these years, the spiritually loose-jointed, tragic influence of Walt Whitman.

Mr. H. L. Mencken once said that the American language was only waiting for the imprint of a major poet like Chaucer or Shakespeare. The remark was absurd for the American language seems to be the greatest difficulty confronting the American poet to-day. It is instable, bullying, commercialized, and Stevens is a very good proof that a genuine American poet will have to make

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strategic retreats through its proximate manifestations to arrive at last at its essence, its ultimately durable core. In some ways no poet seems less a mirror of his native language than Stevens. He has created his poetry out of images and phrases, the meaning of which the American (I believe the English don't read him) has to learn from reading *all* his poetry in somewhat the manner that he would learn a foreign language. It is only after he has become thoroughly familiar with Stevens' images and phrases that their profound intimacy with the American language begins to assert itself, and that he begins to discover how importantly and how intensely Stevens' central meaning inheres in the heart of all his poetry. Imaginative insight, the intuition of art (by which Stevens means the creative, synthesizing insight of any human being at his moments of most intense awareness) becomes, in one way and another, the subject of all his poetry, and the essence of its form. Stevens' poetry has an appearance of highly coloured artificiality—almost of being synthetic. It is filled with images of art, and the appearances in the world it offers correspond to the appearances of the real world only in the most esoteric ways. But these appearances express that central meaning and take fire from it so that what in the beginning appeared to us as artificiality ends, by virtue of that very quality, in showing forth and emphasizing the life-giving power of the central legend with which Stevens is concerned.

It is useless to speak of poetry in general terms, but I wish to do little more here than indicate the position that Stevens occupies relative to other American poets. As far as the poets themselves are concerned that position is a little ambiguous. They pay Stevens a great deal of external respect,[3] but one frequently senses a strain of uncertainty in their attitude towards him, and his practical influence seems to have been small. I fancy that Stevens somehow seems to them not quite to belong to the Party. His detachment is too great and his relation to his poetry too disinterested. Paradoxically, it is Pound who seems closer to them, and whose Americanism is of an orthodox cut, merely turned wrong side out. Pound's dogmatic assertiveness, his sense of importance and function, are all of a kind that is characteristically American. With much less ability and a different orientation he might easily have stayed at home and become another William Carlos Williams. Stevens is somehow less understandable to the American literary scene, and his poetry has had less direct influence than Pound's. And yet it is also an expression of those characteristics of the American poet I have considered here.

V.

I have been concerned with pointing to the existence of an attitude to poetry which, if properly protected and developed, might

[3]Stevens was awarded the Bollingen Poetry Prize last year, which had been the cause of so much controversy the preceding year when given to Pound for his *Pisan Cantos*.

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become a satisfactory foundation for a highly productive period in American literature. It has been necessary to keep in mind some of the dangers that such an attitude runs in American commercial society—but, after all, such dangers are extraneous. Before bringing these notes to a close I should like to probe a little deeper into the nature of the American's sense of function and responsibility where poetry is concerned, and endeavour to see if it carries any specific principle of limitation inherent in itself, and if so, how this affects the nature of the poetry produced. It is possible to approach the problem by considering the American emphasis on the positive affirmation, on the exercise of will, and on the belief that the future can be engineered profitably if one only has the engineers and the materials—in short, by examining the wholly activist modes of American feeling and thinking. I think it is doubtful if the greatest poetry is ever written in these modes, which are never wholly disinterested. If poetry is a fiat, it is never mere assertion, however brave; and if it is a source of truth, it is yet never praiseworthy for its dogma. Probably the greatest poetry in our time is the *Four Quartets*. It no doubt owes some of its popularity to the fact that critics can drag dogma out of it, but that is by the way. If Mr. Eliot was once an American poet (and he may still not be an *English* poet), he never expressed the distance of his sensibility from American modes more fully than in these poems. A measure of that distance may be found in such lines as

> I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; there is yet faith
> But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
> Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
> So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

That great poetry and intense experience should come out of something undergone or suffered in this way is not the first lesson one learns from American poetry. It fails to understand that element of passivity which is part of the base of great art, and it frequently mistakes the turmoil for the reality. Americans are supposed to like—or to have liked in the past—classical art. But it is the rhetorical gesture and not the moment of repose that they are inclined to value most. Mr. Eliot's lines express their remoteness from the American sensibility in a number of ways. The American would not snub Hope (which in his heart at least he would surely capitalize) in the way that Mr. Eliot does. He knows that Hope literally cleared the wilderness, and confronted with the solid monuments she has erected across the continent, the most critical of poets would hesitate to question too radically whether or not it was, after all, hope of the wrong thing. I do not mean that the American poet might not be as critical as the English poet on the surface, but he is too much a part of the fabric to question very profoundly unless he should also be willing to remove himself from the scene for good. Nor would the American sensibility, which is nervous and impatient, understand the goodness of waiting. To be up and doing, even in matters

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of spirituality—to say nothing of poetry—is all its sweetness and joy. Nor could it suppose it was not ready for thought, for too many fragments of eighteenth century rationalism (highly modernized, of course) still inhere in its optimism. And it would have some difficulty in distinguishing thought from the processes of technology, with which it has enjoyed great success. Above all, it could not accept the resignation of the last line. It is much too devoted to activity to allow stillness to come masquerading in that fashion. In a word, dancing is dancing, and being still is something no American is instinctively impressed by.

The sense of function in the American poet is influenced deeply, and essentially modified by this activism. This activism is likely to discourage the greatest poetic achievement, but this, at least, can be said for it: it conceives poetry in a public capacity, and the poetry it produces frequently has something of the forum in it. It is not likely to enlarge experience by the original insights of genius operating at the highest level of the imagination, but it is able to explore and define experience deliberatively or forensically within certain set boundaries and propositions. Such poetry will tend to have a validity in the American scene that it will not always be able to carry over into other contexts. If we can say that this is a serious criticism of the poetry, we should not lose sight of the more difficult point that the very limitation carries its intimate importance for the American tradition itself, which is still in a formative stage.

Having once said that American poetry is in an 'emergent' period, it was necessary to proceed at once to qualifications, but I have certainly not wished to qualify the original statement away until nothing substantial was left. I am the more concerned because I know the English reader will have far less difficulty in agreeing with the unfavourable aspects of this analysis of American poetry than he will have in recognizing the utter inanition which prevails in his own literary scene at present. Bad as it is in many respects, the American scene is better off than the English in these points: American poets have places to publish, and are encouraged to do so; being published they are read, and if their audience is not large neither is it microscopic; they are discussed and evaluated, and if the judgments are sometimes much too high, one can at least say that the critical faculty is invoked; poets have a faith in their function, and if the faith sometimes needs discipline and correction, it nevertheless provides a solid working base on which to begin; American poets have, or come nearer to having, a subject than English poets by virtue of their relationship with a society that is in the process of undertaking new responsibilities that enlarge its historical consciousness and its sense of obligation. It is greatly to America's credit that, whether knowingly or not, she has promoted this sense of relationship. Finally, American poets are supported by a vigorous and warm enthusiasm. If this 'enthusiasm' is an ingenuous national characteristic about which the British have occasionally been condescending in the past, the melancholy literary scene which now surrounds them, and from which anything like

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the English equivalent of American enthusiasm has wearily departed should enforce the lesson that though affirmations may be too loud, and convictions worn as jauntily as cockades, they may be better than none at all. A faith that comes too easily will not produce great poetry, but it may just possibly assist in a survival out of which great poetry may some day come. And the bare problem of survival is perhaps not the least which, in such matters, confronts the English-speaking world.

MARIUS BEWLEY.

WHAT IS 'BACKGROUND'?

THE ENCHANTED GLASS by Hardin Craig (*Blackwell*, 12/6).

With the general thesis of this book—that Renaissance literature cannot be properly understood without a knowledge of the Renaissance mind—there will be ready agreement; for the abundance of information there will be ready gratitude. The range of authorities and sources is impressive, extending from Jerome and Origen to Bacon and Milton, and from minor tracts like the *Life of Paul the Hermit* to the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Most of the central issues are well worth recalling. For example, Prof. Craig sees clearly that what he calls the background of literature 'cannot be just details, or even bodies of separate details attached as notes to particular passages' (p. 238). And, amid so much emphasis on economic and literary movements, it is somewhat re-assuring to find so explicit a recognition that if 'we seek to know the sources of Elizabethan thought, we must turn to the subject of religion' (p. 49). While carrying his own learning modestly, he rightly insists that, whatever our estimate of their value, the doctrines of the Renaissance must be recognized as having important bearings on the literature. In this insistence, he conscientiously avoids (and helps the reader to avoid) despising the Elizabethans for their fumbling attempts at science or their ready acceptance of theories now discarded or disproved; we are assisted towards seeing that what appears superstitious to-day was originally accepted on grounds of apparent reasonableness. On these bases a re-construction of the mental world of the Renaissance is fully justified.

At the same time, the learning presented needs rather more organization than it has received. Neither by general statement nor by individual example are we brought towards any principle of what information is, and what information is not, relevant in a study like this. He does not indicate what kind of clarification we can expect from further knowledge of the period, nor what methods of evaluation it will help us to use. There is hardly any attempt to sort out the elements which helped and the elements which hindered the Elizabethan writer—except for the rather puzzling view (p. 219) that Elizabethan art conventions were simply an obstacle to free inventiveness. The writer himself does not offer any critical esti-

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mate of the *use* the Elizabethans made of their learning; Philip Sidney and Gabriel Harvey are given more attention than Donne, Hooker very much more than Thomas More; Jonson's plays are not mentioned.

There is a further failure to distinguish sufficiently between *representative* writers (like Nashe, Dekker or the pamphleteers) who help us to see what the age was like, and *influential* writers (like Hooker and Bacon) whose importance lies largely in shaping later ages. There seems to be no governing or organizing purpose to cast the learning into a cohesive form from which the reader could go back to the Elizabethans with increased perception of why they used their learning as they did. The book is really a report on extensive reading, having too much the form of a doctorate thesis, the general size, contents and nature of which are prescribed before the work is completed, and the primary purpose of which is to show that a given course of reading has been completed.

The omissions are serious because rather misleading. The subtitle, *The Renaissance Mind in English Literature,* should certainly imply an interest in the mind of the people, or folk. Yet the great effects of the voyages of discovery and such basic documents as the *Book of Common Prayer* and *Pilgrim's Progress* are completely omitted; a passing knowledge of either of these books would have removed such mistakes as occur on page 113 about 'inevitably recurrent sin', the 'ruining of man's environment', and the certainty of 'evil to prevail over good'. The concentration on the scholars has the unfortunate effect that apart from Milton, Prof. Craig neglects completely the degree to which good poetry presents and helps to clarify the beliefs on which it rests. A general impression emerges that the Renaissance mind was entirely the product of the professionally learned—though the impact even on the learned of *Il Principe* and *Il Cortegiano* is barely indicated.

The scholarship itself is rather slack in places. The Renaissance, besides being personified in a manner not exactly suited to serious history, is left undefined (though the writer shows himself aware of its vagueness); the two meanings of *astrology* are nowhere clearly distinguished; *entelechy* is left unnecessarily vague; *physical* is used in the Aristotelian sense (*natural* as contrasted with *artificial*) with out any warning to the reader; and there is a bad misrepresentation in saying that Aquinas 'rescued the soul from the physics in which Aristotle has enmeshed it'—once we see what Aristotle meant by *physica,* we can see that there was no question of either enmeshing or rescuing. The Schoolmen are mentioned in the way common to historians in Engilsh—without any recognition that Scholasticism was a method much more than a system, and included the most diverse interests and even discordant doctrines. There is a sprinkling too of errors which could have been corrected for the English edition. The St. Denis (mentioned on p. 50, and differentiated both in the text and in the index from Dionysius Areopagitica) is now known not to have been the author of the *De Caelestibus Hierarchiis*; a belief in innate knowledge is ascribed to Aristotle; Christianity,

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surprisingly, taught the 'supremacy of the passive virtues'; the Church denied 'demonological possessions and ghosts of the departed dead' (p. 197), although diabolical possession and ghosts are both assumed in the Bible. The passage most open to objection is the foreshortened picture of religion (pp. 50 seq.); not only are essential things omitted and disproportionate space given to the pseudo-Dionysius, but the writer seems hardly aware of the complexities and intricacies of the religion he describes. To speak of Loyola, Xavier, their Protestant counterparts and the mystics as prompted by 'undeliberate activity and intellectual confusion' (p. 189) would seem to indicate that the information about them is drawn from second- or third-hand; the work of Hoornaert on the Spanish mystics (published as early as 1915) and Chambers' more recent life of More discredit such summary estimates.

It is, of course, particularly in relation to literature itself that we would expect clarification and guidance. The general statements are acceptable and even pregnant, but they are merely repeated without development or precise application; it is only smaller items of information which he feels called on to illustrate. On page 121, he summarizes a mechanistic psychology (learned men found 'no difficulty about determining the temperament of any individual') which, whatever its historical interest, is in conflict with the practice of both the dramatists and the religious poets. Similarly, we are told (p. 131) that Renaissance philosophy (on the assumption, apparently, that there was only one such philosophy) considered all women were frail and susceptible by nature; both the accuracy and the relevance of the statement would be hard to establish. Some did, indeed, hold this view of women, but it was neither distinctive of the Renaissance nor restrictive on the playwright. In spite of the priority in time of *Tamburlaine* (and even of *Gorboduc*), Shakespeare is credited with *introducing* formal orations into *Julius Caesar* (p. 163), but no comment is presented on the relation of this to dramatic art.

We are given also some generalizations about literature which indicate that the transition from historical information to criticism is rather beyond the writer's powers. He seems to be unaware of the large assumptions made in stating that 'it is doubtful whether the art of Shakespeare is finer than that of Middleton and Jonson' (p. 83); Marlowe's plays 'show his technical knowledge transmuted into the realization of character' (p. 123), but there is no discussion on the nature or success of the transmutation. Tribute is paid to Shakespeare's 'organic use' of the contemporary psychology, but 'organic' is left to explain itself. On page 187, not only does he speak of the 'thought' of Shakespeare, but he appears to consider the 'thought' of Shakespeare, Milton and Hooker as a single, integrated whole. A grosser simplification occurs in connection with criticism; the 'Elizabethans seem to have had relatively little self-consciousness' in their literary activity (p. 187); their 'creative tendency' is contrasted too sharply with their deficient critical power (p. 207). Prof. Craig seems here to overlook the whole Renaissance

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tradition of exact craftmanship which was a tradition in criticism and is evident even in minor things like Wyatt's songs; no account is taken of the large amount of spoken, or unwritten, criticism supposed, *e.g.* in Jonson's prose and in Shakespeare's useful comments on the linguistic and histrionic aspects of dramatic art. Even from his own premise that great works of art are not produced by mere bursts of creative inspiration (p. 62), he could have deduced the conclusion that the development of dramatic art in the 16th century supposed a clear-headed and determined critical effort.

It is to be regretted that the extensive and earnest scholarship which the book supposes has not produced a more practicable and pertinent guide to the literature of the Renaissance. As the writer himself is aware (p. 238), it is difficult to define what we mean by 'background' in speaking of literature. But he would have served his purpose better by fully recognizing that the important question is not what did the Elizabethans believe, but to what tasks and techniques in literature did their beliefs lead them, and how far did these beliefs help or hinder the perfection of the Elizabethan achievement.

L. A. CORMICAN.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE LAY READER

MALE AND FEMALE by Margaret Mead (*Victor Gollancz*, 18/-).

Miss Mead seems to have constructed her latest work deliberately in order to foil the reviewer or indeed anyone outside her large and admiring lay public. The major objections that one wishes to advance have been foreseen and mentioned without, for all that, having been acted upon. This device is a common one among those who write with that backward glance over the shoulder to those who feel that the subject being discussed is one which, however much one would like to, cannot be discussed in a popular manner without crudity. Thus Miss Mead wrote a few years ago:

> 'There are those social scientists who are unwilling to use tools which they know to be clumsy, when measured against what we may someday develop, as a stone axe against an electric drill. They fear the fellow scientists who may review their work . . . Because we know that we might have better tools and, in fact, are that much wiser than Stone Age man, there is no reason for us to become weaker because wiser, to be ashamed to use our stone axes . . . we should become stronger, not weaker; bolder, not more craven; freer to act'.[1]

[1] *And Keep Your Powder Dry*. Introduction. Published in England as *The American Character*.

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Supposing Miss Mead's constantly affirmed faith in the future of 'our science' to be justified by the nature of that science, it is still difficult to see in the above passage anything more than an excuse for rushing into print with undigested and, by her own standards, highly explosive notions. In the work under review much the same warning is given:

> 'We live in an age when every enquiry must be judged in terms of urgency. Are such questions about the roles and possible roles of the sexes academic, peripheral to the central problems of our times? Are such discussions querulous fiddling while Rome burns. I think they are not. Upon the growing accuracy with which we are able to judge our limitations and potentialities, as human beings and in particular as human societies, will depend the survival of our civilization, which we now have the means to destroy. Never before in history has mankind had such momentous choices placed in his hands. True in the past, etc.' [2]

Very few would question the worth of making such an enquiry but what relation is there between 'the roles and the possible roles of the sexes' and the immediate problem of the civilization 'which we now have the means to destroy'? The prose hectors us into seeing the two as one.

This tone of bullying exhortation is used also to make the reader feel that this book is a whole by virtue of something more than its appearance. We are told that the parade of primitive societies which constitutes the second and third sections has an immediate and 'scientific' bearing upon the fourth section and that there are 'findings' which are summed up at the end. By her own confession we are told she wants to 'give results and yet keep the sense of how these findings have been arrived at'.[3] but we have already been told that 'Each of (the) main parts of the book stands by itself' and can be read in any order 'according to temperament and taste'.[4]

What lies beneath this pomp and scientific appeal is a failure on Miss Mead's part to see what she is really about. The talk of 'growing accuracy', primitive societies as 'laboratories' and the planning of 'forms of civilization that can make a fuller use of all human gifts', cannot be taken seriously in the form in which they are offered. Another reviewer[5] has quite adequately demonstrated that, from this point of view the 'results' of the book are in contradiction with Miss Mead's intentions. The value of *Male and Female* lies in its reporting and insights. This probably accounts for the controlled interest taken in Margaret Mead's work by intelligent women here and in America. Nevertheless, Miss Mead repudiates both of these aims. 'I do not want merely to document vividly'.[6]

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[2] *Male and Female*, p. 9.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 32.
[4] *Ibid*, p. 6.
[5] Diana Trilling. *Partisan Review*. April, 1950.
[6] *Male and Female*, p. 31.

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'Perhaps the greatest annoyance that the anthropologist has to face is from those who . . . insist upon regarding any statement about our contemporary culture as "brilliant intuitive insight".'[7] Even in her repudiation, incidentally, she assumes that we will find the documentation 'vivid' and the insights 'brilliant'. Nevertheless it is insight that is being used as any anthropologist must use it with the difference that Miss Mead uses it as though it were self-sufficient.

The ways in which we dress, eat or write and so on, form with the values of our society a complex which we call our culture. It is never necessary for us to define culture, as the anthropologist must, as that which in communal life is evident to the senses and which is rendered meaningful by the society. The anthropologist may not assume that any cultural fact observed among an alien people has the same meaning as a similar fact among his own people. Initially and inevitably he will make such assumptions but he will make it his business to replace them by more refined notions based upon an analysis of the society behind such facts, *i.e.* he will do what the people themselves never need to do. The psychologist must also have the primary social analysis before him in order to study the mental processes of the people in question.

Miss Mead calls herself a cultural anthropologist and so, presumably, feels justified in neglecting the primary social analysis. An example of the sort of major error into which she thus falls is provided by *Sex and Temperament,* one of her most popular works which is devoted for the most part to the Arapesh of New Guinea. The Arapesh were found to regard 'both men and women as inherently gentle, responsive and co-operative'.[8] We are told that 'Warfare is practically unknown among the Arapesh'.[9] Dr. R. Fortune who has also worked among the Arapesh has described in some detail their highly organized social pattern of warfare. War was suppressed by the administration in 1914 and hence the old warriors were not inclined to talk about it, but the tradition was very much alive.[10] If we compare his account with that of Miss Mead we see, for instance, that the woman Amitoa whom she describes as a temperamental deviant is merely a conservative who is behaving in accordance with the expressed social ideals of some sixteen years earlier and still in a traditional manner. In the light of this factual correction Miss Mead has, in her latest work, merely modified her earlier expression to 'They engage very little in warfare'.[11] but as Fortune's report would call for a total reconsideration of her characterization she does not consider its implications. It is unfortunate that this contradiction has not had the attention it deserves from other anthropologists.

If it is unwise to apply the psychological theories of one society

[7] *Ibid,* p. 452.
[8] *Sex and Temperament,* p. 134.
[9] *Ibid,* p. 23.
[10] Arapesh Warfare, *American Anthropologist.* XLI, 1939.
[11] *Male and Female,* p. 67.

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to another, it is a step further in the wrong direction to build up theories in the field based not upon careful case histories but merely upon observation and surmise. There can be no serious justification (and none is offered) for the theory advanced in Chapter IV.[12] Why after all when Miss Mead sees a little boy (society alien but unspecified) strutting along with a stick or a knife must she assume that this is a 'concentrated phallic exaggeration' and follow on to conclude that 'The little boy is sure about his specific maleness but seems to be not so sure of his adequacy to operate it' ? If the same behaviour were observed in our own society, presumably a different explanation would be offered. Once again a primary social analysis would have made evident the folly of such an immediate application of popular psychology. Here as elsewhere Miss Mead slips over the difficulty by a knowing gesture to her audience. Often as not, however, the appeal is not so explicit. The American child, we are told, 'is born against the force of gravity'.[13] This is not followed up but we are left with the impression that this is in some way significant to the enquiry which is being 'judged in terms of urgency'.

It is interesting to note how often the word 'potentialities' occurs in Miss Mead's psychological discussions:

> 'Those of us who believe in awareness, . . . believe that only by a greater understanding of man himself can we build a world in which human beings can realise more of their potentialities and live in greater harmony one with another'.[14]

It is surprizing to hear of potentialities at this point on the road to social determinism where little Manus become big Manus and little Americans big Americans and no attention has been drawn to any dynamic factors in the societies discussed. This, however, is her philosophy of potentiality and enters in defiance of her own ethnography.

Miss Mead shows herself aware of the questions which arise for believers in anthropology as a 'Science'. The main problem is perhaps best formulated by Beatrice Webb in the Introduction to *My Apprenticeship*:

> 'Assuming that there be, or will be, . . . a science of society (in the sense in which we have a science of mechanics or a science of chemistry) is man's capacity for scientific discovery the only faculty required for the reorganization of society according to an ideal? Or do we need religion as well as science, emotional faith as well as intellectual curiosity'.

Miss Mead trys to deal with this in a very interesting Appendix[15]

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[12]Chapter IV, 'Even-Handed, Money-Minded, and Womb-Envying Patterns'.
[13]*Male and Female*, p. 268.
[14]*Ibid*, p. 431.
[15]Appendix II. 'The Ethics of Insight-Giving'.

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but even if Beatrice Webb's prejudice as to the issue is quite clear in the passage quoted, we cannot say that Miss Mead makes any satisfactory approach to the problem at all. Whereas the former assumed that there was, or might be, a science of society, Miss Mead has demonstrated and, by this point in the book, half confessed, that all we can do is understand and gain insights into the ways of other societies. We are in fact far away from the portentous 'urgency' of the opening chapter. The relation of power to ethics cannot be profitably discussed with the aid of a long and strained metaphor about hitching waggons to stars and extending over three and a half pages.[16] Miss Mead plays with this happily and succeeds in removing the problem from the level of discussion to that of rhetoric and finally palms off the following passage as a solution:

> 'The whole dilemma of knowledge and freedom can be solved, I believe, only by a climate of opinion in which those who work and those with whom they work, those who write and those who read, those who teach and those who are taught, those who cure and those who come for curing, learn to share together the belief that increased knowledge can indeed make men free, that one can fashion one's culture closer to the image of all human hearts, however different, without manipulation, without the power that kills, without the loss of innocence that deprives us of spontaneity'.[17]

The trick mentioned above of lifting a problem from the level of discussion to that of rhetoric is one constantly employed in this book. The passages quoted in this review have not been selected to demonstrate this but inevitably do so. Only by neglecting this fact can any coherent statement be derived from her work for consideration. It is obvious and her wide sales testify that she knows her audience well. It is to be deplored that it does not know her better.

D. F. Pocock.

CORRECTION—The last line of Mr. Pocock's review, 'Social Anthropology: Past and Present', in the last number of *Scrutiny* should have run: 'into the mass [*not* 'mess'] of ethnographic literature'.

[16] *Ibid*, pp. 437-40.
[17] *Ibid*, p. 445.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

CHAUCER THE MAKER by John Speirs (Faber & Faber, 12/6).

This book, a large part of which appeared in its first form in *Scrutiny*, has now been published. In accordance with our general practice, it will not be reviewed in *Scrutiny*.

'ESSAYS IN CRITICISM'

We are glad to welcome the first number (January 1951) of a Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism which, under the above Arnoldian title, comes from Messrs. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. The Editor is Mr. F. W. Bateson. Price 4s. Annual Subscription: 15s. net post free or $2.10.

INDEX TO 'SCRUTINY'

VOLUMES I to XVI.

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